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BELLA DONNA;

OR,

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME.

A Romance.

BY

GILBERT DYCE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LONDON:

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BELLA DONNA.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUNDAY FEAST.

Nor on the high road, with two mounted travellers of elderly or youthful aspect trotting leisurely along; nor yet at the inn-door, or inn-window, where the gallant Alexandre the Elder sets his boisterous Gentlemen of the Guard; not by the death-bed of the lady of high degree, who has just brought our hero into the world; and not in my lady's boudoir, where she is gossiping pleasantly with her

female friend and counsellor, *a secretis*. Not with any of these traditional precedents does this chronicle set out upon its march. It may not boast the Lord Mayor's show, and gorgeously appointed procession, to which romances of grander lineage are entitled as of right. This is but a simple narrative, which must be helped along without such brilliant properties and decorations. So it starts off one Sunday afternoon, when the Franklyn family are giving a sort of sober Sunday banquet in the dining-room of their old mansion down at Grey Forest.

At this sacred festival were assembled the whole Franklyn family then on the premises, as well as such neighbours whose function or position gave them a title to be present. The room which was the scene of such delightful intercourse, took up the whole lower front of the right wing, which bulged out in a corpulent bow, running full up to the roof, which overshadowed it, like the flaps of an old-fashioned waistcoat. And there being another wing also suffering from dropsy, and perfectly

symmetrical, furnished also with its waistcoat and flaps, the two were joined together by a central strip of building, much like that band of flesh which united the two Siamese gentlemen who visited this country many years ago. It was, in fact, a sound, old-fashioned country-house, not nearly old enough to be shown, or to have priest's hiding-places, or embayed windows, or any of the theatricals of old mansions; but of sufficient antiquity to be uncomfortable, and so far advanced in life as to be old-fashioned.

This parlour, where the decent Sunday revel was going forward, was painted in a tawny buff, which intruded wherever the pictures did not hide the walls. These were but feeble ancestors at the best—in bottle but a generation or two—with a coloured coat and a wig or so among them, yet scarcely of the proper ancestor pattern. The furniture, too, was of a bald meagre order, with sharp edges, and vast expanse of rude horse-hair; while at the upper end of the room in the archway, was erected a sideboard structure, whose superincumbent

weight, furnished with abundance of brass railing, was supported on thin insufficient spikes, by way of legs, which seemed to push vindictively into the carpet, like a row of single elderly ladies' parasols. This piece of architecture will be a key to the whole tone of the other decorations of the apartment. A key, too, to the tone of the Franklyn family, which came of that decent country-house stock, which is always a few hundred yards, or so, behind the rest in the great procession of civilization.

Mr. Franklyn—Joseph Franklyn, Esquire, of Grey Forest—sits at the head of the table, in one of the skeleton arm-chairs, whose arms curl under his elbows, like rams' horns. He is a widower, and there is no Mrs. Franklyn. A quiet gentleman, timorous, not overloaded with language, and enjoying habitually a steady flow of low spirits. Present, also, were his two daughters, pleasant elegant castings from the average young-lady mould; his son, Captain Charles Franklyn—a soldier, home on leave after a three years' service in India—a youth with curly hay-coloured hair, a fair face,

and sly retiring moustaches, who would be come more brazen by and by—rather tall and thin, and a little loosely put together. Present, too, Miss Jenny Bell, a distant and very indistinct relation, who has been with the Franklyn family some months, on a delicate debatable footing. Present, also, a loose miscellany, medico - venatico - ecclesiastical ; the Venerable Archdeacon Dilly, Doctor Splorters, the Reverend Henry Blowers, M.A., Incumbent of Grey Forest, with his curate, the Reverend Charlton Wells ; young Tilbury, the Gentleman-Grazier ; and “Bobus” Noble, as he was called, who lived astride of his horse, during the day bodily, and at meal-times metaphorically, nearly all the year round. Thus it will be seen here was the chief, sitting at the head of his wigwam ; and, to put it delicately, there was an air of official connection between the chief and the gentlemen collected at his board. They were cheerful, and, perhaps, ever so slightly, uproarious. For their hearts were glad, and the week’s labour was done, and the day’s sanctification

was happily through, and the chief had graciously bidden them to his wigwam. There was another Miss Franklyn, eldest of the girls, who was not present, but away on a visit, but would be home again in a few days.

The ministering menials tramped round and about, in and out of the room, with much goodwill, and, perhaps, still more noise. They came in somewhat unruly procession, bearing the huge "pieces of resistance," which were to make the parasol legs of the sideboard quiver uneasily. There was much shifting of these burdens from arms awkward to arms less awkward, with attendant perils, and hasty clutchings and shiftings of the huge cover, with noisy metallic din. For even in these elements and *personnel* of the retainers were found more helps to that tone in which the Franklyn family lived. For here was the septuagenarian butler, much bent, and generally decayed, and even indistinct of utterance, yet jealous of his dignity, and intolerant to his coadjutor, who had been artfully and benevolently furnished to him. Here was this

bony pink-cheeked menial, whose coat of office came in flowing folds about his knees—exceptionally tolerated at these feasts of greater grandeur, as a useful supernumerary, yet, perhaps, more at home upon his box, with whip and reins in his hands. Yet he is willing, and even eager; and with no special duty allotted to him, carries on a guerilla and predatory warfare of his own, swooping down upon loose plates, and knives, and glasses.

On, the outskirts hover beings of questionable shape and figure, mortals but ill at ease in their adventitious trappings, and whom even the charitable must dimly associate with the ostler interest. These *cagots*, whose position is undefined, are victims of a monstrous and galling tyranny; and from behind the parlour-door are wafted at times, sounds of suppressed suffering and hostile altercation.

Grand heir-looms of the Franklyn family decorated the table. An ancient epergne of solid silver, and a little stooped and bent, like the septuagenarian butler, glorified the centre. To it nodded homage, a series of chandeliers,

with twisted and curled branches, also unsteady and precarious in their balance. On the sideboard, stately pillar-lamps diffused a sickly gloom, not unmingled with a suspicion of oily infragrance, owing to some interior irregularity.

Mr. Archdeacon was pleasantly shouldering his ecclesiastical crutch, and showing how clerical fields were won. A dry caked face, that had been well in the ovens of human life, with sharp eyes, that were always peering and looking diligently after his men. He was always trudging diligently round his sacred preserves, poking the covers with his foot, and keeping a wary eye upon his under-keepers. He was always on the beat, as it were, carrying a loaded 'charge' upon his shoulder, which he let off in print annually. At this moment he was, by anticipation, exploding some of its contents directly into Mr. Joseph Franklyn's person; while the Reverend Mr. Blowers, seated close by, looked on and listened with delight.

Archdeacon Dilly can be heard lamenting

the alarming spread of dissent-rampant. For of the gentle passive shape of difference from the Establishment, he was amiably tolerant; but for these rude and boisterous anarchists he had no love. They were the disreputable game-stealers, the brazen poachers of society, who cast on the authorized keepers the disagreeable duty of awkward encounters and violent scuffles. 'We cannot be too much on our guard, my dear Blowers,' said Mr. Archdeacon, again directing a portion of his 'charge' full into the bosom of his subordinate, 'against these ravening wolves. The hydra head of dissent is again lifting itself; it grows apace in strength, and will tax all our energies. I cannot, therefore, caution you too much, my dear friends, to be on your guard against this dangerous monster who now walks abroad with an astonishing effrontery.' With the close of these remarks the Archdeacon, with a gentle pressure, cracked a walnut with the proper instrument, as though it had been a dissenter's head. Then delicately picking out the crushed portions of the brain of the un-

happy dissentient, he consumed him with relish, leaving the fractured portions of the cranium on his plate.

Later on we see the quiet head of the Franklyn family drawing over his chair nearer to Mr. Archdeacon. 'I wished to consult you,' he said, a little nervously, 'about a rather important matter. You have such an aptitude for business, and know the world so well, whereas I am as helpless as a child.'

'Do you speak of the Endowment? It is sadly wanted, and your neighbourhood is destitute—very destitute;' and with the word 'destitute' another dissenting skull was fractured, 'and——'

'No, no,' said the other; 'we are too poor for that as yet. But there is a young person staying with us, a sort of a—kind of a relation, who has been left an orphan. And you know something is expected to be done under such circumstances.'

'I understand,' said Mr. Archdeacon; 'wishes to earn her bread, as it is called.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Franklyn, hastily, 'not

quite that. You see she wishes to go out into the world, and *be* with a respectable family, on a peculiar footing, you understand.'

Mr. Archdeacon shook his head.

'There is no debatable ground in these matters. Let her subscribe to the formularies or not; but let there be no reservation.'

'But this is not a question bearing on the Church,' said Mr. Franklyn, timorously.

'I was speaking figuratively,' said Mr. Archdeacon; 'possibly you misapprehended me; possibly *I* failed to convey myself.'

'We had great hopes,' said Mr. Franklyn, 'that something was going forward between her and Doctor Blower's young curate. At least, until lately. A most desirable thing it would be.'

'Do you mean young Wells?' said Mr. Archdeacon. 'Surely no; you can't mean that unbeneficed young clergyman. Surely not. I hope not—I sincerely hope not. It is not at all desirable, let me tell you, Mr. Franklyn, that these sort of impoverished alliances should be encouraged in the Church.'

It don't do, sir; and I must speak with young Wells on the subject, without loss of time.'

'It has not gone so far as that,' said Mr. Franklyn, with much trepidation. 'Dear me, no. It is only some of the foolish stories of the parish, and——'

'There should be no foolish stories in the parish,' said Mr. Archdeacon; 'I don't consider a parish healthy where there are foolish stories.'

'I was saying,' said the other, 'that has not gone beyond our own house and family; at least, it is from the girls only that I have heard it. Dear no! there can be nothing in it—nothing.'

'Where is she?' said Mr. Archdeacon, abruptly. 'Did I see her when I came in?'

'She is sitting,' said Mr. Franklyn, mysteriously, 'low down towards the end of the table on this side, next my son;' and the two heads, the lay and archidiaconal, bent over and looked down the sweep of the table, across the twisted arms of the ancient epergne, to the place indicated.

CHAPTER II.

JENNY BELL.

THIS was the figure they saw at the bottom of the table, sitting next Mr. Franklyn's son. That lively and engaging youth was fighting his tropical battles over again, and the face of Miss Jenny Bell, his neighbour, with eyes cast down, was turned towards him, absorbing every word of the magic tale. This was a round, blooming, fresh face, with brown hair, brought very low upon the forehead, and laid on, as a painter would, in rich underflakes, as low indeed as is seen in a westerly Irish peasant girl. The light from the crane necks of the old twisted chandeliers, seemed to fall on it, and glisten like delicate splashes of molten silver.

Mr. Archdeacon, though a spiritual man, and with something of the appreciation of the oyster in all matters sentimental, took notice of her full sleepy eyes, brown also, and (this, of course, privately within himself) of a roundness in the figure of Miss Jane Bell. For she is not of the company of immaterial virgins, who are spiritualized away by the macerations of romance, and who, by an unaccountable prejudice, are always sought out to play 'first woman' in five-act dramas of Della Crusca. She was no misplaced angel, who had been shifted by cruel mistake into these pastures of earth; who was in daily protest against the unspiritual blessings of sound health and enjoyment, or was revelling in the blessings of a weak sickly frame and feeble constitution. Jenny Bell was piquant, fresh, and fair.

Had that soldier boy of the House of Franklin, beside her, been merely an absorbed curate, or the transaction at all savoured of the ecclesiastical, so as to make it worth the trouble to consider it seriously, Mr. Archdeacon might

have abstracted himself temporarily from his Preserves, and bethought himself seriously what absorbing matter they could be so busy with. But it would have been poor matter for clerical digestion, being merely a stream of speech from the young soldier, who prattled with all the ingenuous ardour of fighting men of tender years, and with that personality for which they are remarkable. She listened devoutly, with downcast eyes, and with glowing cheeks. In that light from the twisted chandeliers, she looked a refreshing bit of colour, beside whom the others seemed faded, insipid sketches, washed in with water colours. She was round and fresh as a piece of ripe fruit. Long had it been since he had found so rapt a listener for those empty narratives of his, which were of the common pipe-clay order, and not worthy of embalming in any shape.

But there was a tone and enthusiasm in this military improvisatore, which lifted it above a mere vulgar yarn. For him the tawny walls of the ancient dining-room, with its spindle furniture, was filled with floating clouds of a

golden glory. With the gay scene spread out behind, and the players all in their theatrical suits, and ladies all decorated with flowers and ornament, and rising from a delicate white froth of muslin, with a little sparkling *mousseux* stream flowing steadily, sufficient to raise human pulsations a little above the cold orderly motions of common life—with these adjuncts the Sunday festival in the country-house becomes a welcome gala; the tongue begins to dance, yet not in the vulgar sense; and that little boy, whom we hear so much of in the mythology, if by any chance he be lodging in the mansion, begins his wildest tricks. Into this house of Grey Forest, seat of Joseph Franklyn, Esq., it was very plain he was residing, a welcome and an honoured guest.

This sort of duet or fantasia of the affections, is sweet music enough for the two performers; but others, who sit at a distance, and see that there is music going forward, yet cannot hear, are usually by no means warm dilettanti. Save, indeed, the virtuous, aged, and 'noble fathers,' who look with the professional smile

of benignity, on the tender gambols of the 'young people.' In the country districts, there is a pastoral simplicity which is not too nice in construing the formalities of the *ars amoris*; and a greater licence is tolerated, as, perhaps, outside the jurisdiction of the court of Hymen. Perhaps it was from some such feeling, or from a dulness induced by association with the flocks and herds, and properties of nomad life, that the Franklyn family took no special heed of this relation between their humble cousin and their brother.

But there was another, who sat just opposite—a pale, yet manly face, with a high forehead, from which, at one corner, the hair was wearing slowly away; from whose cheeks blossomed out a rich underwood of dark whisker; one of those faces we see sometimes in the ranks barristerial, and but rarely growing from the calyx of the white-tie professional. His sharp, piercing eyes, roamed to and fro uneasily, but usually returned to settle in a steady painful gaze upon the two delighted and unconscious musicians before him; and though he shammed

a poor sort of make-believe, as if in lively and animated talk with a Franklyn girl who sat next to him, still there came uneasy twitches about his mouth, and sudden catchings at the table-cloth, as some fresh burst of harmony from the orchestra opposite was borne to him. For the width of a dining-table is a strait almost as fatally impassable, at least as concerns time, as that of Dover. And this figure, thus standing on the shore, at the edge of the damasked sea, looking over so wistfully at the Promised Land, was the clergyman at whose proceedings the archidiaconal brow had contracted, and who was labouring under the disability of impoverishment, and the rich emoluments of a pauper curacy. This was the Reverend Henry Charlton Wells.

Perfectly true was the household legend rehearsed by timorous Mr. Franklyn to the Archdeacon—perfectly true in all details. The whole Franklyn family, but specially the girls, to whom it had been a pet *trouvaille*, welcomed it with inexpressible delight. For, however reasonably may be questioned the ungallant

aphorism, that every woman is a rake at heart, it is to be feared that they are walkers in the faith that lives by making of matches matrimonial; and, however mixed the common motives of human actions, here at least is a whole army of virgins and female confessors, perhaps, beyond the age of a tender female virginity, busy unselfishly with their neighbours' good, and preaching the sweet, sweet gospel, that it is not good for man to be alone.

This poor ecclesiastic—who had tramped through the usual university round laid out for promising ecclesiastics, of scholarships, prizes, senior wrangling, and such honours, with a dash of vigorous boating and muscular pastime; who had been known as “Wells of Maccabeus”—had happily reached to the goal of Orders, like many more of his brethren. Then falling to the Rev. Dr. Blowers as his clerical freedman, he might have been a happy Hodman-in-orders, labouring, not indeed in the heats and rains, but with a calm tranquil round of duty, not by any means too distressing, beating the fields of his parish, with a

tranquil energy ; dining at this house and that, made welcome in squires' society, and deeming, in his simple faith, that individual books upon his shelves were as much as friends, and had as complete an individuality as many of the parishioners, in which perhaps he was not wholly astray. So that in this simple religion he might have lived for years, as well known along the district roads as was Parson Yorick ; doing some little fishing, both in trout streams and in the greater human river (which latter was, however, the more profitable), until there came, in due course, the regular aureole, and he would be assumed into the seventh heaven of full Rectorship. In short, a bright, healthy, vigorous, young cleric, who might go on, careless and incurious, satisfied that Europe, Asia, and the other quarters of the globe, lay within his cure.

Suddenly, that distant connection of the Franklyn family, that bright and dangerous Miss Bell, who by deaths of proper guardians and reverses had become "chargeable to the parish," in a genteel way, was thrown upon the

inhabitants of Grey Forest. The luckless curate came direct in her road. Loud was the twang of the bow. She did not very much mind what particular game was struck, so it might be called properly a random shot. Then was heard the crashing in the bushes, and down came the noble animal on its fore feet, stricken sorely. That was about twelve months before the Sunday Festival which brought together that company at Grey Forest, of which we now know something. It is not so difficult to see how matters stand during that ceremonial, looking at the way the parties are seated. The soldier has entered upon this garden of Eden, say a month before, and yet here all the flowers have been trampled under his ugly hoof. And yet not by any means one of the professional captains, fitted out with letters of marque, among the gentler craft. Rather a poor frail barque, whom a skilful brother of his own cloth would have shattered and sent to the bottom very speedily. Perhaps it was the flag, the scarlet flag, he carried at the fore, and the golden

cordage, that bore him through so triumphantly. In a few hours, the plain, heavy, sailing lugger of clerical build, was miles astern. It was cruel, but it is the story of every day.

CHAPTER III.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THERE they sit, the soldier and the lady who is "on the parish," side by side, and the poor ousted curate looking on from across the dining-room table. By the college of surgeons of the art of love, this sense of "ejection," this "eviction," and feoffment to a new tenant is held to be the most acute suffering, and the most difficult of treatment. On one side of him sits a girl of the house, Mary Franklyn, on whom he has been playing a sort of ghastly animation and strained gaiety; so that this undeveloped creature, some sixteen or seventeen years old only, thinks her fascinations have on a sudden prematurely burst out, and that she is already skilful with her

gun. Some say that fine plump ecclesiastical bird, the curate of whatever degree and stipend, has ever a strange fascination for the female fowler. And this young country-house child could not but feel a pardonable pride at the thought of ensnaring her clergyman, which was pleasant sport enough. Sweeter still, however, to the female breast is that sense of helping one's self to a neighbour's property.

But under Mr. Wells' spasmodic merriment was an utter weight of what might be called a spurious despair; for the crisis was not yet serious enough for the presence of the genuine passion. And at every fresh symptom of intimacy opposite, a hand seemed to gripe his heart with a sudden clutch which made him sink and collapse interiorly; yet that Miss Jenny Bell, still glowing with her electric light, was not cruel or barbarous. Often she turned to him with a look of encouragement; very often she appealed to him, and took him in graciously into her talk; yet these are but poor plasters to one with the clergyman's malady, which renders its victim marvellously

quick-sighted, and had turned this "evicted" one, naturally simple, into a perfect Talleyrand. He saw through that complaisance of hers, which was done out of charity and sweet compassion, and it only wounded him more.

Hearken yet again to Mr. Archdeacen, far away at the top, now taking say his last round of claret before the ladies shall go.

'And so you like your new man of business,' says he. 'Suitable and satisfactory?'

'Perfectly,' says Mr. Franklyn; 'most wonderfully intelligent; has set all my affairs right; looks into everything; in short, I am quite pleased with him.'

'Did I see *him* when I came in,' said Mr. Archdeacon, again raking the table inquisitively. 'Ah, I see, next young Wells. Ah, very good, v-e-r-y good.'

The new man of business was next Mr. Wells, but on the other side; a man of business about whom there was nothing remarkable, saving, perhaps, his extreme youth for a man of business. But such a 'gay, light-souled, jocund creature, just, as we might say, let

loose from his day-school, as innocent as a child, lively as a kitten, and positively stored to the brim with jokes, riddles, *cogs à l'âne*, and absolute nonsense, in which latter department he excelled; that was his main charm. Delightful man, Mr. Crowle—people said—charming man, Mr. Crowle.

So his little congregation found him; those that figuratively 'sat under him,' and, according to the flesh, sat about him. Another Franklyn girl, who had a distrust of him at first, was forced into indecent bursts of merriment by his legends. And yet so young—only four or five-and-twenty, and looking not so old. And this man, such a profound man of business, closeted for these few days back with the head of the Franklyn family.

This jester did not move our pair by his antics beyond a polite smile, out of mere compliment. Our curate relished them with an overdone and obstreperous merriment, truly melancholy to hearken to. He talks nonsense, rhapsody, and runs fragments of the dismal protests running! in his head into the speeches

which he pours out upon the Franklyn girl beside him; a piteous exhibition throughout.

And now the ladies glide away; and an eager gentleman, agile beyond the rest, holds the door handle, and smiles on the troop passing by him with a conscious smirk. This office does somehow bring with it this little pride, as though it had been won by personal prowess, and the fair, passing by, were to drop wreaths upon his lance. Now do the surviving men, left with awkward gaps in the ranks, through their devotions, look round them doubtfully, and survey each other distrustfully, as is the manner of men who shall now have to form new connections. Slowly, however, they gather, as the head of the Franklyn family nervously invites his guests to 'close up.' Then he accumulated his decanters upon Mr. Archdeacon, hampering that gentleman's movements by a disorderly gathering of promiscuous vintages. Then he and Mr. Archdeacon fell again into confidential talk, on the outskirts of which Doctor Blowers skirmished uneasily, while the rest of the com-

pany, led by 'Bobus' Noble and Mr. Crowle—Philip Crowle, Esquire—chorussed it boisterously, and made of the claret jug a perfect vicious Wandering Jew, never suffering him to rest his weary foot an instant. The poor 'evicted' curate, though actually between these two vociferous talkers, sat as it were apart, and smiled vacantly, where all the world was laughing boisterously. 'Bobus' Noble had his heavy weight carrier, so well known with the Furzeby hunt, brought round, not actually in the flesh, but a sort of spectral steed; and mounted him there and then, and before the eyes of the company took him over the great 'Ha, ha!' down at Gogby Corner; not content with which feat, he went through the whole of the events of that remarkable day, and insisted on the spectators riding with him over many miles of country.

Naturally the young man of business was indignant at being thus forced into the chase at so unseasonable a time. Nothing is so justly odious as this hunting despotism, which justly rouses the abhorrence of every well-

ordered mind in the community; and yet the lively young man of business did not protest—did not struggle to fling off the yoke, but entered into the exciting incidents of the chase, with true relish. This young man of business, though naturally anxious for his share of conversational glory, still had a wonderful sense of self-restraint, almost premature for his years. And so Mr. Tilbury and ‘Bobus’ Noble together ‘took’ that jump and this, ‘flew’ that ditch, got ‘pounded,’ sir, by Jove, and ‘dead beat,’ sir; and ‘then,’ continues Mr. Noble, branching off into an amusing incident of the field, ‘when I got up to the fence just by the hollow, who should I see but Biggs, the cotton-spinner, on that square chestnut of his, right at the fence. My beast was dead lame, so I pulled up short; and there, sir, would you believe it, Biggs, who gives any figure for a horse,’ &c. There is a curious similarity in these legends of the hunting field; so not very much is lost by suppressing the embarrassment of Biggs.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

IN the drawing-room all the Penelopes wait their lords patiently. These noble seigneurs arrive presently, and graciously partake of coffee. Mr. Archdeacon—measuring the company round with a quick suspicious eye, as though he were uncertain whether he should get them there and then into the Court of Arches—selects the elder of the Franklyn girls for his prey, and swoops down upon her, coffee-cup in hand. ‘Why is your sister away? when is she to be back? what keeps her?’ said he, examining her himself before the Court. ‘She will be back the day after to-morrow. She is staying with the Cravens.’ ‘I see—I see,’ said Mr. Archdeacon. ‘At Sir Welbore’s.

Very good—ve-ry good; quite proper. And now, Mr. Crowle there,—I've not seen him—I've not met him! How's that now? Been here long?'

Mr. Franklyn here glides up quietly.

'We are talking of Crowle, your new man of business. A rather agreeable person—that is, *as a man of business.*'

'He is not to be judged by his years,' said Mr. Franklyn, 'for he knows—let me see—he knows as much as—a man of double his age. So sharp—so wise—so brilliant!'

'A very singular person,' said Mr. Archdeacon, looking over to Mr. Crowle, who was now performing a legerdemain trick with no other property than a pocket-handkerchief. 'Pity he didn't take orders. These sort of versatile talents are what we want in the Church,' said Mr. Archdeacon, a little ruefully.

Mr. Crowle came over presently, having finished his trick, and was presented in due form to the admiring dignitary.

'If,' said Mr. Franklyn, 'you should ever

have need of a person to set your house in order——’

‘That belongs to our profession,’ said Mr. Archdeacon, with a smile.

‘And lands,’ added Mr. Franklyn; ‘and in fact I may say, to help you generally out of confusion and embarrassment, let me advise you to think of Mr. Crowle. I have known him but for a short time unfortunately; but during that period he has been of enormous assistance to me—enormous! He has set an estate free from a load of encumbrance.’

‘But young Mr. Charles,’ said Mr. Crowle, gaily, ‘will do the rest. A good prize in the marriage lottery will be worth all my poor labours.’ All three, standing together at that moment with their coffee-cups in their hands, looked towards the quarter of the room where young Mr. Charles was. A few moments before they would have seen young Mr. Charles sitting on a sofa, beside the fresh girl who was dependent on the family, apparently busy looking through a little miniature gallery of photographic portraits, studying them with that

deep earnestness, which shows that the mind had travelled far away. But now, when that tripod of human figures which stood together in the centre of the room, each busy with a coffee-cup and spoon, turned towards that sofa to look, it was empty. There was a greenhouse beyond, dimly lighted up, and two figures were seen indistinctly standing among the tiers of flower-pots.

‘He will make the best of husbands,’ said Mr. Franklyn, with a gentle enthusiasm, ‘he is so affectionate, so good-natured. Now that relation of ours, Mr. Archdeacon, whom I was speaking to you of, she has need of every comfort and sympathy, poor child. And you cannot conceive his kind and respectful attention to her ever since he has been here.’

‘Ve-ry good,’ said Mr. Archdeacon, ‘quite proper.’

‘She naturally feels the delicacy of her position,’ said Mr. Franklyn; ‘and I must say for Charles, he has done everything to make her feel at ease.’

‘Quite so,’ said Mr. Archdeacon, coughing.

‘He has a good heart has Mr. Charles,’ said Mr. Crowle. ‘Though I have had the honour of knowing Mr. Franklyn’s family but for a short time, I said so from the beginning.’

‘He is always full of that nice careful thought, which is not to be expected in a boy of his years—for he is only a boy.’

‘Quite so,’ said Mr. Archdeacon. ‘And you think of marrying him soon. I think a very wise resolution.’

‘Why,’ said Mr. Franklyn, looking around timorously, ‘he has come home partly for his health, and partly for that. The first reason he knows; the second he does not suspect—as yet. He will do anything for us—for his family; and I have some one already marked. You see!’

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Crowle, wisely, ‘I see. Excellent! Capital! How clever!’ There was nothing in the scheme worthy this panegyric, yet the praise made Mr. Franklyn look wise in his turn. And on that Mr. Crowle looked wiser again than he. Mr. Archdeacon looked

neither wise nor foolish, but coughed again with much dubiousness. 'Yes,' said Mr. Franklyn, 'there is a young lady, very beautiful—but that is no matter—and very well off; very splendidly off, I may say. Something is on foot in that direction. It would be premature to say more now. You understand?'

'Perfectly, perfectly,' said Mr. Archdeacon.

'Ah! that is the true way to retrieve an estate,' said Mr. Crowle, perfectly lost in admiration. 'All our English estates are more or less dipped. In fact, it is the proper condition of a really healthy estate. A little retrenching here and there; a little looking into matters; and then sweep all clear at once with a good bold stroke. Marry your eldest son to an heiress, that is the mode in fashion now. Ah! Mr. Franklyn, you understand these things, I see.'

But the grand topic that day, both at dinner and all through the evening, was a certain local bazaar, to be held within two days, for certain local charitable purposes. There were collieries near the Franklyns,—huge profit-

able collieries, that burrow away underground in all directions, and even under the Franklyn lands. Not, indeed, that the Franklyns were blessed enough to possess any of these English gold mines: they were unlucky enough to have parted with the Royalties, at a time when it was thought it would be a vain speculation. Directly they were parted with, a vein was lit upon and worked with gigantic profit. This was quite a type of the Franklyn 'luck' through life. They always acquired blessings and parted with blessings at the wrong time. This bazaar, under the most distinguished patronage, was for the benefit of The Distressed Colliery Orphans, and all the Franklyn girls were to hold tables.

Presently comes in from the greenhouse, from among the leaves and flower-pots, that bright dependant of the Franklyn family, floating in a cloud of muslin; her round face glowing as though lit up from within; her figure bringing colour in among the sombre neutral tints scattered over the scene by Mr. Archdeacon and the rest of the company. The other girls

were with her in a moment, and she was presently sitting between them with an arm round each of their waists; for she was very affectionate, this relation of Mr. Franklyn's, and demonstrated her regard in this way by a hundred little manifestations of this sort. She was charming to talk to in this sort of dear and confidential fashion, about things not by any means confidential; and these children—for they were next to children—delighted in this kind of private whispering, *coram publico*. They worried her now very gaily as to what she had done with Charles. Had she buried him in a flower-pot, or changed him into a scarlet geranium?

‘Jenny, dear,’ said one, ‘what do you and Charles make out to talk about? You know he is the stupidest creature on earth; and we are sick of mess and parade.’

‘And he hates ladies,’ said the other; ‘but he likes Jenny, I think.’

‘Likes me,’ said Jenny, with a half-melancholy burst: ‘not at all. You have no idea the sharp, cruel things he says to me. But I

hope, dears, he will get over his prejudice; time works wonders, they say.'

'I know,' said the first, 'what Jenny is thinking of; she is making poor Mr. Wells jealous. He doesn't know what he is doing to-night. Look! he has been staring at "The Vernon Gallery" for the last half-hour, and never turned over a page,' said Charlotte.

The other sister looked at him a little wistfully — she was thinking of his devotion at dinner, and her little conquest.

'Poor fellow!' she said, 'he suffers.'

'Let us plague him a little,' said the younger sister. 'He preaches too long; do make him more jealous, that's a dear Jenny, and to-morrow we shall have a grand making-up.'

'Seriously,' said the other, 'how I am longing for it; you must just plague him a little more, and then give in—it will be charming. And papa says when that odious old Blowers "turns up his toes"'

'Hush, hush,' said the other sister; 'for shame, Charlotte.'

All three then laughed secretly at the in-

cumbent, who, utterly unconscious, stood not many yards away, expounding parochial matters to the Doctor.

‘Papa says he will give Mr. Wells the Rectory. But, Jenny, for how long more shall you tease the wretch? Only fancy your being settled only a mile from the house.’

‘You are all too kind, too good to me,’ said Jenny Bell, with an earnest warmth; ‘you two darlings, you know, are the only things that would make me think of such a thing at all—for people in my place there is no choice; and yet, he is far above me, and you are all too kind to me—too kind.’

Tears stood in the gentle Jenny Bell’s eyes, as she thus hinted at her really desolate position; and the two sympathising sisters were presently cheering her with their traditional caresses.

The poor wounded curate at his table—who has been staring with strained eyes at the view in ‘The Vernon Gallery,’ with a steadiness with which that view was never contemplated

before—steals a look across, and wonders what is this sorrow. Who knows—perhaps he has unconsciously, and by some action unknown to himself, outraged—for he is a little rough and uncivilized in his ways and manners—that tender heart. He has been conscious, too, of what he interpreted as appealing looks, entreaties for mercy directed towards him from that sofa, where she sat the centre figure of the Three Graces. And so the injured curate, softening every moment, and becoming a small Magdalen in his penitence, is about rising up preparatory to casting himself at her feet, when he finds the room become of a sudden all disorganized, and every one making ready to depart; a clearly inopportune moment for any pathetics. There are a tribe of unlucky beings on this earth who are specially marked out for these crosses and contradictions, who, after prodigious argument and hesitation, select the most awkward hour of the whole twenty-four—and the most awkward minute of the awkward hour—for their plunge or purpose.

Mr. Archdeacon's one-horse carriage has now

come round, and wishing 'good night' to all heartily, he trips away as though word had been brought to him that there were poachers in the preserves of the Church, and he was anxious to get his ecclesiastical gun down, and go out and find them. 'Bobus' Noble reluctantly dismounts from that wonderful weight-carrier, for which he gave One eighty—'pon my soul, sir, not a pound less'—and goes his way, drawn by an ordinary hack, of low price and mean power by comparison.

So with the Doctor—so with Reverend Doctor Blowers—so with the crushed curate, who, utterly wrecked and without the common decent aid of ordinary dissimulation, could not disguise his grief and his disappointment.

They were gone, and the drawing-rooms were left in that sort of waste and desert usually seen after guests have departed. Lights still burning, and without purpose; furniture disordered; and a few survivors standing scattered here and there, looking to each other to have a sort of lonely air. Mr. Franklyn stands upon his own rug, the Selkirk of the place. Usually

when his company went their way, a new train of disagreeable guests arrived in their room, and gloomy thoughts and anxieties only temporarily dislodged (just as people of the house give up their rooms to strangers) came hurrying back promptly. But to-night he was thinking of the orange blossoms and the grand heiress he had in his eye. And he saw Mr. Crowle, the new man of business, skilfully co-operating—clearing one field after another of the estate; and the heiress doing the rest all in one *coup*. Full of which agreeable thoughts, he took his candle, and leaving the three twined together still as the Three Graces, passed down, as he always did of a night, to his study. For he generally took a short spell with spade or hoe among his papers and figures before going to bed. As he stood, candle in hand, wishing them all good-night, he said to Jenny Bell, encouragingly—

‘What is the matter to-night, Jane? I have hardly heard your voice. Not low-spirited, eh? Never mind; all will go straight yet.’

He looked meaningly at them all round, alluding, no doubt, to that lovers' little difficulty, as *he* took it to be, then passed away quickly to the sacred study, and was presently shovelling up the marl of docketts and figures down below.

Then they all went up to bed ; that is, carried out the pleasant young ladies' fiction of going to bed : which in this instance signifies going up to dear Jenny's little room, to talk over the whole night again. It was plain that this duty could have been gone through with more convenience by that famous drawing-room fire, still blazing merrily; yet it was held to be altogether a different thing. There was a cosiness and comfort about the dressing-table which set the whole course of events in an utterly different light, and lit them up so to speak with fresh colours. And so the young ladies being gathered here again, released the zones of the girdles in concert, and enacted the whole of that night's scene over again.

One of them would rally Jenny pleasantly upon the love-sick curate, the other joining her,

yet not with the same enthusiasm, for a reason we know.

‘It will be delightful,’ said the one ; ‘we will get papa to build you a house, and he will easily get the bishop to make up a new living for him near the house.’ (The girl’s notions of the extent of episcopal power were, it will be seen, a little loose and erroneous.)

‘Yes,’ said her sister, ‘you must leave us, Jenny. We must see you every day ; we will go and take tea with you.’

Jenny humbly deprecated this brilliant prospect. ‘My dear children,’ she said, ‘you think of poor Jenny’s powers of fascination too highly. I am a very plain ordinary creature, that must try and please everybody. But, darlings, you are mistaken about poor Mr. Wells. At most, it *may* be a foolish passing fancy ; but to dream of me as a partner to a good clergyman, in his holy round of offices, darlings, it is a terrible responsibility to think of.’

‘What nonsense, Jenny !’ laughed the girls ; ‘everybody marries a parson without thinking twice about it.’

‘Indeed,’ said the other, ‘there is one thing, the odious white tie,—“choker,” Charles calls it.’

‘It is the sacred symbol,’ answered Jenny, ‘which marks him out from other men. But it is only a dream,’ said Jenny, gaily. ‘I have a life of work before me: *you*, dears, may think of such things.’

Then they came to talk of the bazaar—the coming bazaar—the absorbing topic: how they would dress; how much they would sell; how their stall would look; and how kind it was of Lady Lambkin to help them. That noble person was indeed going to assist them; and was kind enough to allow the stall to be labelled Lady Lambkin’s stall, and kinder still not to contribute a single article: but to hold herself out to the public as the registered proprietress of the shop. These acts of kindness are happily not rare.

Then the hair came down *en masse*, and they talked of many other things, and finally went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASHTON COUNTY BAZAAR.

ASHTON was the county town of the county in which the Franklyns lived, and Ashton was the place where the scene of the great bazaar was to be laid.

All religious denominations. Everything sectarian rigidly excluded. Under distinguished patronage. Analysed, the distinguished patronage comprised the following elements :—

Patronesses.

The Lady Mantower.

The Lady Ringtail.

The Lady Moleskin.

The Lady Margaret Tilbury.

The Hon. Mrs. De Bloom.

Mrs. Maindrum.

Mrs. Peekes.

Mrs. Welbore Craven.

Mrs. Roan Philips.

Mrs. Tidyman.

The Misses Franklyn.

&c. &c. &c.

Most of these ladies had kindly signified their intention of holding stalls, and for the last two months the air of the county had rung with the din of preparation, and the faint tinkling of the various instruments in the great armoury of crochet and knitting-needles.

It is not too much to say that close upon one hundred sofa cushions of graduated sizes were known to be in progress; on which were displayed every variety of human pattern: diaper, lozenges, crossbars—also specimens of the great animal family, the dog (lap and other kinds), the dog's head, with a letter in the mouth, the dog couchant, and the dog rampant. What was known as 'the banner

screen' was largely run upon, and innumerable specimens of that form of ornament were known to be well forward; and the 'banner screen,'—in most instances, meant to be a proud shape of decoration when mounted in a costly manner,—usually resulted in an article of a spare and spindle look, generally shrinking away into poor, not to say mean proportions, as though there had been some mistake in the cutting out. Every proprietress of a 'banner screen' invariably determined to *exploiter* her work by the agency of the lottery-ticket, half a crown each.

But it would not be fair to pass over without notice, the very meritorious labours of one special family, Mrs. Ryder and her daughters. After all, given the unlimited command of costly materials, it is easy to produce a dazzling effect. This is an unfair competition. The skilled workwoman is at a disadvantage. And yet not in the least disheartened, Mrs. Ryder and the Misses Ryder carried on their labours, and by the mere agency of such simple mate-

rials as card, Bristol board, a little gold paper, a little coloured paper, some glass, and I believe a small mixture of bran (used, however, with judgment), and gum, which is the basis of all, produced the most marvellous results. A little fur from a decayed boa, and a glass bead, were surely poor materials to work with ; and yet with this frayed scrap of fur and the beads, and it must be added a little gum, the basis of all things, Mrs. Ryder in person produced a wonderful likeness of a little dog, on a little scarlet cloth rug, perfect in ears, tail, nose, and everything a dog should have. The fame of Mrs. Ryder for these little creatures was naturally spread far and wide, and it was known that for the coming show, bazaar that is, all hands were at work night and day to furnish a supply of the mimic animals adequate to the anticipated demand. Nor was it in dogs merely that the art of these skilful ladies was conspicuous. With versatile talents they were owned to be unapproached in the manufacture of little card-boxes, watch-stands and

cases (wonderful to say, of the same simple material, gum of course being the basis) ; dressing-boxes ; anything, in short, to which that universal material could be made to lend itself. The Ryder family confined itself exclusively to this branch of the profession. Everybody laboured industriously in the good cause.

It was a fine day. It was a festival for the county, and a gala for the little town of Ashton. The great room in the Market-house had been kindly lent by the authorities, and had been decorated 'with much taste and elegance,' said the local paper, 'by Mr. J. Ramsbottom, the eminent upholsterer of our town.' It must be said that Mr. J. Ramsbottom's exertions were bounded by a sort of general distribution of blue and pink calico, wherever that material could be conveniently introduced ; still the effect was gay and striking. In an adjoining chamber was the band of the Ashton Rifles, who, by the 'kind permission' of Colonel Dutton, were allowed to perform 'some of the beautiful airs'—I quote again

from the local paper,—‘for which this corps is so justly esteemed.’

The Franklyn family went in their carriages. All the county families went in their carriages. The dresses were of the gayest. No distinction of creed or politics. Mr. Hounhym, Lady Moleskin’s son, was there, and Lady Moleskin herself held a stall. So, too, did Lady Margaret Tilbury. And yet it was well known that the relations of these two families had been much embittered by a recent election struggle in which Mr. Hounhym and Mr. Tilbury had lately been engaged. Mr. Hounhym was even seen, amid breathless admiration, to purchase a smoking cap from Lady Margaret Tilbury, and went through the ceremony with smiles, and much good humour.

It was a very gay sight. The wares were crowded together, and the sellers of the wares performed their function with ‘engaging grace and propriety’ (words taken from the local journals). The matrons stood behind as presiding shopwomen; notorious by very new bonnets secured with a gala tightness under

the chin. They were to be recognised as appointed lady-shopwomen, even outside the marks and tokens about them, by the flushes and heats of office. They were supported, each matron, by a fascinating daughter—inexperienced, blushing, unused to trade—falling into unshopwoman-like mistakes every moment. They engaged Captain Tidyman and Major Hoskyns at short range, and seduced those officers into heavy purchases. But the matrons never lost what might be called their business eye, and took a strictly cash view of the whole.

The Franklyns' stall was kindly presided over by Lady Lambkin, there being no matron in the Franklyn family. Round her clustered the girls. Charlotte, the eldest, should have been there, but Miss Jenny Bell took her place; not by any means intrusively, but keeping studiously in the background, a course to which she was indeed almost driven by the strange behaviour of Lady Lambkin, who kept sniffing at her from her throne in a disdainful fashion. If she were snorting fire from her

nostrils, she could not have more effectually scorched away Jenny. The Franklyn girls—gay, natural, joyous things—went to their work with spirit, and really did a surprising amount of business. They did not scruple to accost strange persons passing by, and with importunity forced sales; yet never overstepped the line of a modest persecution. But there were other hoydens loose in the room confined by no stall or counter, who had broken from their halter and scoured the plain. They had their hands full of tickets—tickets invariably for ‘a banner screen’—and presented their cards at the head of the passer-by like a pistol. Other wayward coquettish skirmishers had built for themselves a delightful little post-office, with a letter-box and an inquiry window; with a guerilla skirmisher of adroit and insinuating address in front. She played the part of ‘bringer’ in military language, and led up the captive postulant to the window, where a voice proceeding from a new and elegant London bonnet wished to know the name of the person expecting a letter; and where, after a short

delay, a letter was found, actively directed as desired, which on payment of only one shilling was handed out to the amazed inquirer.

It was altogether a very pleasant scene. The unholy rattle of the dice was heard even above the imperfect musical accomplishments of the Ashdown Rifles; and gaiety was enhanced by the spectacle of tall men carrying helplessly about with them unwieldy cushions, which they pressed tightly to their bosoms like infants, because they knew not how to carry them in any other fashion.

And yet Miss Jenny Bell, while shrinking out of the direction of Lady Lambkin's hot and disdainful blast, could not bring herself to overlook the meritorious ends of the charity. In her modest retiring way she tried to engage buyers. She was not very skilful at her needle, but had contrived to put together a sort of nondescript little bag of simple shape and pattern; which was a bag for no special purpose, but which Jenny fancied in her helpless way was 'a tobacco pouch.' She clung to this article tenderly, and put it forward

with every advantage; but somehow it did not seem to attract. Elderly gentlemen passed it by almost with contempt,—passing by, too, Jenny's shrinking introduction of it to their notice, which in itself was worth money.

The curate, the Reverend Mr. Wells, had known of this precious work long before; in fact, through all its stages of production. He had offered almost a year's stipend for it,—implored that it might be his. But Jenny was good-naturedly obdurate, protesting that she would not let her friends waste their money on such a humble, homely thing; he must buy some of these other pretty things. 'Come now,' she would add with mystery, 'he should have these charming slippers for a guinea. No?' and the pretty shopwoman sighed.

Major Carter and Captain Manger, quartered in the town, had lounged in, and were soon at Lady Lambkin's, inquiring the latest market quotations with a great deal of interest. That noble lady heaped her wares upon them profusely,—a purse, a cigar-case, a large cushion, a bag and a handkerchief,—but failed to suit

them. They lounged away gradually towards the left, and began to enter into treaty with the more piquant shopwomen.

These gentry are never profitable customers ; for it is part of their faith that some gracious notice, and possibly a crude compliment or two, is excellent coinage and fair payment for all goods. Jenny said to her neighbours, 'Now, dears, we must make these creatures buy ;' and with this end proceeded to lavish all her attentions on an elderly lady who was then cheapening a sixpenny doll. The military gentlemen asked the price of this and that, and everything, which she reluctantly—reluctant at being interrupted—told them, and returned to her elderly lady. This abstinence has a curious effect always. 'Was there nothing they could raffle ? Come ! This lady's work-bag, for instance ?' taking up Jenny's own work. 'That was a tobacco pouch,' said Jenny ; and had cleverly in her own mind organized a raffle on the spot. 'Tickets two shillings and sixpence each, please.'

She had those two soldiers throwing dice for

at least a quarter of an hour for her tobacco pouch ; throwing in a half-provoked, half-amused fashion, and bringing out wretchedly low figures. Jenny seduced them on and on like a Circe. 'Oh, how near !' she said in deep grief, as one gentleman threw twenty-one. 'Oh, *do* try again ; you *must* try again.' But when they finally desisted, she became cold and indifferent, and eventually wholly absorbed in a gentleman who was turning over a cigar-case. This is the morality of bazaars.

But young Mr. Franklyn from India had not as yet come to the table. The curate had hovered about it in agonies, while the officers were making their advances ; and was much relieved by the way in which they were dismissed. He kept coming back and coming back, but still was useful ; for he was sent away to dispose of tickets, and charged not to come back without money ; which last, he sometimes, to purchase smiles of approbation, supplemented out of his own means. But young Mr. Franklyn had not come up as yet. This was the reason.

Mr. Franklyn, senior, had gone in himself to the festival. He never indulged in treats of this sort; but this was pure business. That Mr. Marley, who possessed a large estate not very far away, but whose father had been in a manufacturing walk of life, where he had picked up funds to purchase the estate,—that Mr. Marley should have been at the bazaar, was a matter of no very great concern to any one. But he had brought his only daughter, Miss Marley, which did greatly concern Mr. Franklyn. This was the young lady about whom he had consulted Mr. Archdeacon.

To this young person was young Franklyn led. She was tall and pleasant to look on; she was gracious too, and her natural guardian was encouraging. Young Franklyn was charged to lead her about to various stalls, which he did chafing and reluctant,—a foolish, stupid child of a soldier, who did not know what was good for him. Mr. Franklyn talked to Mr. Marley, but watched the pair from afar with a wistful eye. No wonder; for as they receded, he saw fading out of sight his long train of

mortgages, bonds, and charges, which this happy alliance would remove for ever.

Soon, however, on some pretext, young Mr. Franklyn shook himself free; he had presently, with true fraternal instinct, glided over to his sisters' table. The curate felt his presence by an utter blankness at his heart. Jenny was suffering from the heat, from fatigue, from her labours, and more than all from Lady Lambkin's fiery blasts; whose formal pride had been wounded by the felonious abstraction of many valuable customers. The girls felt for their friend. Would Charles take her away and get her some refreshment? The curate writhed.

They went. Charming Mrs. Welbore Craven, a youngish married lady with an oldish husband, stood behind a stall selling cakes and ices, like a real confectioner! It was exquisite the grace with which she went through her functions—gave and received change—and asked the special character of ice wanted, in the true confectioner's key. Her dress, exquisitely in character, heightened the effect, and

excited universal admiration. Gentlemen clustered round and gave large orders. Ices two shillings and sixpence each—but then, consider, in the sweet cause of charity; and a large sum handed in to the committee from the sale of ices, would be an advertised testimonial to the power of Mrs. Welbore Craven's charms. It is well known that old General Bulstock, who has to visit Vichy and other waters every year—for a generally disorganized interior—was well-nigh reduced to death's door from eating three of these delicacies in succession; and thus purchased three of Mrs. Craven's smiles and three pretty speeches.

Young Mr. Franklyn took Jenny up to this lady's stall, and gave her an ice. He then walked round the rooms to give her air and general relief. They saw the little sucking-pig tied up with pink ribbon, which Miss Boleshiver was raffling; they saw the post-office in brisk work, and inquired for letters directed to Charles Franklyn, Esquire, and received one. Then they talked of the sales, and curious to say, with an absence of mercantile morality to be

paralleled only at scenes of this kind, the little tobacco pouch became the property of Charles Franklyn, Esquire, under earnest protest from Miss Bell, who indeed gave no consent; thinking of a sort of implied contract with various 'rafflers,' civil and military, with whom a sort of faith should be kept. But young Mr. Franklyn had it all his own way.

Then they went into the next room to sit down; few came that way, so they excited no attention. But the curate of the anxious wistful face, who had missed them at once, soon began to seek after them with a raging jealousy, and peeped in with a secret conspirator-like fashion. He saw them talking very earnestly. I suppose there was at least an hour consumed in the operation of getting that ice.

Presently they came forth, the youth with a flushed cheek and a sort of triumph in his eye. The curate marked them nervously. Then came up Mr. Franklyn, senior. He had been looking for his son everywhere, having missed him, and found him absent from the rich Miss

Marley. The youth went back at once, eagerly. He was in high spirits, and exaggerated in his devotions to Miss Marley. That young lady was pleased and very gracious. Her father looked on with a kindly eye, for he respected the old blood and good lineage of the Franklyns. Mr. Franklyn looked on too, from afar, and was glad in his secret soul.

It was altogether a most successful gala day, to be long after talked of by country firesides. The Franklyns drove home all in spirits, most of all Mr. Franklyn; for he had engaged to dinner, for next Thursday, Mr. Marley and his daughter, Miss Marley, who had both accepted with *empressement*. He scarcely spoke going home; and was even complimenting himself upon his own sagacity and skill in conducting his business thus far, so successfully.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FRANKLYN'S VISITORS.

AT dinner it was a perfect Babel. Everyone told their adventures; everyone spoke together. There were a hundred droll little scenes rising out of buying and selling experiences. How old Lady Mantower had waited to the very end, and then had gone round, shabbily buying up really good articles at a frightful depreciation. How that stingy 'Bobus' Noble, with all his free speech and his promises yesterday, could with difficulty be persuaded to part with one shilling, which was wrung from him with inconceivable pains and difficulty. How one old gentleman had set his eye on a special cushion, for which he had thrown a high number, and kept jealous watch and ward

over it the whole day, coming back every five minutes, and demanding to know the state of the dice poll—as though he suspected foul play, which indeed he might have done reasonably ; for such *was* intended—one of the girls wishing that a certain young Alfred Carter—who generously spent his little all among them, taking ticket after ticket—might, by some pardonable hocus-pocus, have the prize shuffled over to him. But what could be done? He perversely threw the most ridiculously low numbers. This wretched old gentleman watched them narrowly.

Jenny Bell had in truth the greatest triumphs of all to record, and yet she was pensive and silent. They thought she was tired, or perhaps that she was annoyed by the noble Lady Lambkin's behaviour. Young Charles Franklyn was not so lively, or even boisterous, as customary ; but that did not seem remarkable. At the close of a long day, gentlemen are sometimes silent, or even moody, without ostensible cause, and there is always indulgence.

It was a perfect series of comic sketches, and they were very merry over them the whole evening. But the most fascinating part of the whole, was the counting over the gains of the day. A little money-box, bursting with shillings and sixpences and sovereigns, was emptied out on the table; and being laboriously counted, was found to amount to the grand total of twenty-five pounds six shillings and sixpence. It was marvellous, and yet, strange to say, a little margin had to be allowed for bad money: even in this sacred cause the corruption of human nature was found to enter.

So the evening passed away. Mr. Franklyn went down to his study as usual, but a good deal later than usual.

While he is thus busy, there is a light tripping step in the gallery, and some one taps very gently. He is down with his head bent into a low drawer, and does not hear. So the door is softly opened, and that round figure of Jenny, bright as ever, stands nervously on the threshold, with a timorous—

‘Might I speak to you, sir?’

The loud crash of the drawer closed violently, and the Franklyn face, lifted hastily, and seeming a little pale and nervous, is the answer. He stands up, entrenched behind his desk and papers.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘what is it? What do you want? I am rather busy now.’

‘Oh nothing, nothing, sir. I beg your pardon—*indeed* I do. I do not intend it, I assure you.’

And our poor frightened Jenny, utterly, scared, does indeed seem ready to sink into the earth. Naturally the slightest rebuff was to her the stroke of a flail.

‘No, don’t go away,’ said Mr. Franklyn. ‘Come in, Jenny, and tell me what I can do for you. There, sit down,’ he added, kindly. ‘Now——’

Still shrinking, she says—

‘Oh, sir, I intrude upon you; I have disturbed you. It was only to tell you, sir——’

‘Now sit down,’ said Mr. Franklyn, taking

her hand in his, 'and let me hear this important communication. You wanted to tell me——'

'Sir—dear sir—you won't be angry, but I must go away.'

'Do you mean, leave our house?' said he, in astonishment.

'*I must* go home,' she said. 'You have been so good, so kind to me—but I *must* go; it is better that I should—far better.'

'Why, I can't comprehend,' said Mr. Franklyn, looking at her, a little bewildered. 'You seemed so happy to-night, and to like us all so.'

'I know, I seem ungrateful—ungracious, she continued, not bursting into tears, but agitated; 'but you, dear—*dearest* sir—will understand me, when I say it is better that I should go. *You* know how happy I have been. Oh! too happy.'

All doubt and gravity passed away from the head of the Franklyn family in an instant.

'Oh—oh!—I see—I see,' he said; 'I am

getting old and stupid; and perhaps thinking too much of my own business. I should have known—of course I should. Cheer up, my little girl,—don't be thinking of such desperate measures. We shall set it all straight in the morning.'

And the head of the Franklyn family looked at her with knowingness and encouragement, showing that he understood the whole embarrassment. He had seen and remarked the curate's wan and dejected face. It had crossed him many times during the day, looking out wistfully for something. It was too plain. A lovers' quarrel. Poor Jenny, poor child!

But our Jenny could not comprehend him. She was so simple, so full of childish gaiety, that she would accept a statement with the plainest sincerity, but meanings that were undercurrents she could not reach to. So her round eyes opened and her round cheek glowed again.

'I owe it to your goodness, dear sir, to leave. I shall find a home somewhere. But let me not take with me the thought that I

have in any way taken advantage of your goodness. It was not my fault — indeed it was not.'

And Jenny sought the hand of her protector, and gently pressing it in her own, devoutly raised it to her lips; with the light of Mr. Franklyn's lamp quite close, and playing on her face, it looked a perfect bit of Etty handling.

Mr. Franklyn cheered her as best he could. He still thought of the clergyman.

'My little girl,' he said, 'we will talk it over to-morrow, when I shall settle everything to please you. There is one thing you must put out of your head. We won't let you go. There, good-night.'

She was gone some ten minutes, and Mr. Franklyn was again deep in his mystic drawer, when another tap is heard at the door, and the drawer is again closed smartly. His son, Charles, the youthful warrior, entered. He was agitated, and closed the door with some solemnity. Mr. Franklyn was a mild patient man, and not likely to protest against such interruptions.

‘Well, Charles,’ he said, kindly.

‘My dear father,’ said the youth, hurriedly,
‘I must speak to you.’

Another parent would have testily sworn the whole world wanted to speak to him that night, but Mr. Franklyn was very gentle.

‘Ah, I know,’ said he, drily. ‘Well, I am very glad you have come down. I want to hear about it all—from beginning to end. Give me your hand. I was delighted with you to-day.’

The youth was confused, and gave his hand in a dull, guilty way.

‘She’s a fine girl, Charles,’ said Mr. Franklyn, ‘and one we should like if she hadn’t a penny. But shall I tell you what her father said to me? Now, I think, coming from him, it was very encouraging. He said——’

‘Oh, sir,’ said Charles, interrupting, ‘it is not that. It was not about this—I wasn’t thinking of it; but about——’

‘Well, all in good time,’ said Mr. Franklyn, poking the fire. ‘Draw your chair in, Charles. Money, I suppose? Don’t be afraid. I don’t

mind *now*. How much? Come, don't be afraid.'

'No! no! no!' said the young man, eagerly. 'Nothing of the kind. You have always, sir, been so—so—affectionate to me, gratifying all my desires, that——'

'Well, Charles, what do you wish for?'

'Yes, sir. And I think you would not make me miserable—unhappy—wretched for life——'

'Good gracious, no, Charles! Why——'

'You would not see me ill—sick—dying, perhaps; for you know, sir, I am not strong, and——'

'Good heavens! Charles, speak out. What *do* you want?'

'Sir, sir, forgive me. I don't know how to tell it to you—but—but——'

A strange paleness suddenly came upon Mr. Franklyn's face, and he looked down mechanically at the drawer, where he had been digging.'

'I don't understand you. Speak out,' he said, thickly.

‘Oh, sir,’ said the youth, covering his face,
‘I LOVE JENNY BELL, and am utterly miserable, and I shall die if you do not let me marry her!’

CHAPTER VII.

JENNY BELL OUTCAST.

THE next day gloom overcast the Franklyn mansion; a grim ogre had stepped in, and was walking about. It was as though a funeral were about to be, and the body were lying upstairs.

Such a blow had never fallen upon a simple family. It reacted on the whole house.

Mr. Franklyn was as though he had been seized on by a stroke. He sat stupified, in solitude—barricaded in his study. A weak, timid man, with no trenchant argumentative powers of storm and attack, he had no influence, for terror or otherwise, in his family. It had fallen on him like a bolt, for none knew so well as he what tremendous interests depended

upon a sort of commercial marriage being brought about in his family. So that at first taking his son in with much nervousness and trepidation—for he always dreaded scenes,—he spoke to him as though the thing were a mere theory, utterly puerile, and not to be thought of for an instant.

To him, the son, in a sort of heroic rant and declamation; that he must die; that his health was poor; that he would never get over it; and that, to live at all, he must marry this surpassing Jenny. The father then tries duty, affection, and the simple, autocratic '*moi je le veux.*' It couldn't be,—it was not to be thought of,—but with equal success. Then, as is usual with weak minds, flies off into a poor, frothy passion,—threatens,—tries a poor make-believe of wrong, without any bottom to support it,—sets the other on his mettle,—who becomes defiant, heroic, positive, and independent;—will go forth upon the world. Let the Franklyn estate be sold; let them dispose of it as they will, without reference to him. There is his commission still left; let that be


sold too. He will face the world, he and his Jenny. He will work for their common subsistence; with more of the like extravagance.

As for the condition of our Jenny, it is truly piteous. Everyone must do her this justice, that she could not have foreseen this complication; or, that when she did see, she nobly went to the head of the house, and would have denounced the mischief. The tears, the floods of tears she shed that day! The way she outpoured her sorrows, first into this, then into that, sympathising heart. She wept, and was wept with, upon the stairs, in the passages, in the boudoirs, dining-rooms, gardens. The whole female world condoled with her. But to go away she was determined.

Upstairs in her little room the packing went forward diligently. The small black trunk, which took all her little moveables,—there was not much heavy portorage in those worldly effects, a simple wardrobe, in good taste and sufficient,—was the whole. A dreary ceremonial that ‘packing,’ at which assisted mournfully all disengaged females of the house.

The head of the family did not, indeed, regard her savagely, but looked on her with suspicion and distrust. It was enough that she should have that destiny of domestic expatriation before her; but most cruel of all—as she must have felt it—was that coldness and injurious suspicion from one she loved and respected. The whole house joined in this view. The gay laugh, the joyous spirit, in which they delighted was not heard. The bright eyes,—the lamps of the house,—were a little dim.

Dinner was an awful ceremonial,—long remembered. The soldier, who was in mutiny, kept away. Jenny sat there, a dull statue, but did not eat. Before the end she flew away precipitately, having previously answered some questions a little hysterically. Reproachful glances were all focussed directly upon the head of the family, who grew red, and hot, and uncomfortable. For surely, of all the harmless, cheerful, engaging things to have in a house,—a kind of social light to the eyes, and a gentle stove for the heart, one who furnished the



merriest music in the orchestra all the year round,—was this Jenny Bell. That was the popular sentiment. The girls, to be sure, were little more than advanced school-girls, the age wherein an extravagant ‘heroine worship’ is developed; and that youth in his military suit about as much a man as little Tommy, who is girt about with a cheap tin sword, a sham cartouche pouch, and a light wooden gun. But this is the stuff of which admiring multitudes are made. It did not make much matter, for our poor Jenny was resolved to go out upon the world with to-morrow’s dawn, early, before anyone was up (this carefully stipulated), unbreakfasted, unanointed, unannealed. Was not the little trunk lying upstairs ready corded?

The gaiety of Mr. Crowle,—who was of the party,—was likewise damped. That exuberant man of business was, as it were, turned in upon himself. He looked with interest over at the poor victim,—this self-devotion and social Sutteeship,—and seemed to compassionate. Coming from him, who had looked

forward to rich nuptials as the best pumps and engines for clearing the flooded district, and who had been diligently employed in getting things ready for setting up such useful machinery,—it was more than could be expected.

So the gay man of business,—whose gaiety had been so much damped by this mournful state of affairs,—came over to Jenny that evening, in the drawing-room, before dinner, where all were sitting like a company of ghouls, and talking in whispers, and sat down opposite to her, with whom two female friends were sympathising.

‘This is sad news,’ he said, ‘Miss Bell; weary news. Still fixed on going to-morrow?’

‘Yes,’ she said; ‘alas! I must.’

‘And yet,’ said Mr. Crowle, ‘I don’t see the necessity; of course, *that* is no reason why there should not *be* a necessity, or why you should stay, or why you should go; but, still, it seems to me very curious.’

Miss Bell made no answer; but it was plain that this merely touching on the subject was

distressing to her, for her fingers were busy with her pocket handkerchief.

‘I think it a pity,’ continued Mr. Crowle, in a ruminative way, ‘you are so liked in this house. But, of course, *that* is no reason; I mean, whether *I* think it a pity or no.’

Miss Bell answered devoutly, ‘Ah, you do not know me! I cannot tell you *how* I feel, and what it will cost me to part. Oh! to-morrow! to-morrow!’

And Miss Bell, scared at the prospect of that terrible morn, covered up her face. The girls who supported her gave soothing comfort and consolation. ‘Dear Jenny!’ ‘Darling Jenny!’ were heard amid their caresses.

Mr. Crowle was much interested.

‘And yet, it is very hard that this penalty should fall on you,—you personally,—who are as innocent in the matter—if I may be pardoned the expression—as the child unborn.’

‘Yes, indeed, Mr. Crowle,’ say the two girls, in chorus.

‘*You* never thought, dreamed, that Mr.

Charles had such a thing in his head; *you* never gave this perverse young gentleman what is called encouragement. No wonder it burst upon you like a thunderbolt.'

Miss Bell let her handkerchief drop from her face, looked at Mr. Crowle, and then said, 'Ah, you at least understand me.'

'I can conceive the surprise of such a thing,' he went on, 'your wonder, your stupified wonder at the discovery. Your thoughts, perhaps, all the while in another direction,—forgive me the remark,—in possibly a sacred direction.'

'Mr. Crowle!'

'I only wish to illustrate my meaning. Let me say, in *any* direction. I only wish to convey my notion of the surprise and astonishment which must have fallen on you. It is certainly hard for one so perfectly innocent to have to suffer.'

This gentleman's thus harping upon an unpleasant subject, naturally troubled our Jenny a little. She fixed her round, imploring eyes upon him for a moment, then rose and went

over to one of the girls. Dinner then came, and Mr. Crowle, the gay young man of business, went down last of all, rubbing his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOMESTIC BATTLE.

A GLOOMY evening. Mr. Franklyn, with the mark of a sort of domestic Cain upon his brow, and clearly uncomfortable, retired promptly to his fastness in the parlour, and entrenched himself there. Mr. Crowle went now and again into the library, read a newspaper or book, and came back again shortly, drawn, as he said, by an irresistible fascination. For Jenny Bell, instead of 'giving way,' as many a girl of her age would have done under the dispiriting influences of the occasion, struggled,—not manfully, which is sometimes but a poor shape of struggle, but *womanfully*,—to keep up the spirits of her friends. She even affected a sort of gaiety, a sham imitation o

her own natural gaiety ; she went to the piano, and sang some of her favourite songs, which had been wont to plunge the curate into a delirium of mournful admiration ; for ‘it was the last night,’ as she said many times over, ‘and she *must* go in the morning.’ The little modest trunk already packed, &c.;—and now that she thought of it, it would not be, perhaps, *too* much to have the—carriage—might she? Surely it would not be too early. The evening after, at four o’clock, she would be at home—as she must now call it—with a benevolent aunt, who would harbour her a few weeks, until it would be seen what results advertising in the *Times* would bring. A very brave and resigned little Jenny—so at least she seemed to those in that room ; and presently the clouds began to gather, and the rain to drop in heavy showers of grief. So these obsequies went on on that dismal night that Jenny Bell was talking of going away.

About ten o’clock a step was heard on the stairs, tramping down hurriedly, and one of the Franklyn girls said nervously that it was

Charles. The trepidation of the circle increased prodigiously when the door of the fastness below was heard to open and then close again, with a stern and defiant bang. There was a solemn interview, then, going on between father and son. What a moment of trial for our Jenny Bell! And yet, was not the result for her utterly indifferent? for it is known that it was her firm purpose, no matter what reconciliation was arrived at, to quit the mansion. Such a course was only due to her sense of self-respect.

It was a long and painful struggle. She had announced it to the girls, who were first aghast, then indignant. The next question was, where she was to go to, or *could* go to? That was not of so much concern, she had a little money put by; the world was happily sufficiently wide. At all events, in *that* house at least was not her place, bearing discord and miserable estrangement between dear members of the same family.

The way in which our Jenny spoke of these matters was truly piteous, and the light she

set them in very forcible. So, as may well be conceived, she took all hearts with her.

More than half an hour was spent in that unseen struggle below. Finally, the door was heard to be flung open, and Mr. Franklyn came tramping in, very heated and very wild, and trembling all over, followed, too, by his son, with flaming cheeks, and a general flavour of stern heroics over him.

‘I take you all to witness,’ said Mr. Franklyn, in a loud quavering voice, ‘what this foolish, headstrong boy is bent upon. Let him take his own course, and carry out this precious bit of insanity. Let him marry a beggar if he like, and make himself—me—you all—beggars, too!’

In justice to this excited man, it must be said that he did not see Jenny Bell at that moment—she was sitting rather in the shadow, and he took her for one of his own daughters.

So gentle was she that she made not the slightest protest at this cruel epithet, but was presently struggling with hysterical sobs. For

these are a sort of emotion it is impossible to disguise.

Wounded and reproachful glances were bent upon him from many quarters. Even he was touched, and began in a sort of fashion to excuse himself.

‘You know, yourself,’ he said, eagerly, ‘we are not rich. You know this,—you came to me yourself to tell me as much. It is a miserable thing, and will be our ruin. Of course beggar is—is—scarcely the proper word; and—and—I did not see you here; but *I* can’t help speaking out plainly, when I hear of such utter folly and insanity——’

‘Beggar, then, let it be,’ said the youth, still flaming in his heroics; ‘she has no need to be ashamed of it. How, sir, could you be so cruel? But to me it is a prouder title than if she were Queen or Countess, and I should have more joy in linking my fortune to hers, in this—indigence, than if she had millions.’

The youth’s voice trembled as he sent forth this splendid sentiment. The female by-

standers, though filled with terror at the tragic significance of the drama, were overflowing with secret admiration, and even awe, at this magnificent chivalry.

And yet, Mr. Franklyn was not a sort of paternal Jove Tonans, thundering forth maledictions with fury and menaces. He was more agitated than angry, and was really a prey to fright and confusion of mind.

Jenny Bell came forth from her shadow, and with trembling limbs advanced into the middle of the room, possibly making for the door. She fixed her large full eyes upon the enraged lord of the castle—they were swimming in tears—

‘Indeed, sir,’ she said, ‘I, and I alone, am to blame for this. Unfortunate, wretched creature that I am, to bring such trouble into the house of my best friend and benefactor.’

‘No, no,’ said he, ‘I don’t blame you—that is, I do you injustice,—you could not help it—certainly you could not.’

‘Why did I ever enter this house?’ broke out Jenny, now in a torrent of tears. ‘Why was

I not left in the obscure station that fitted me, and go down at once into the rank that best suits one of *my* reduced means? But to be guilty, to *appear* to be guilty of such ingratitude to the friend that raised me up, the benefactor that cherished me——’ And here Jenny could not go on further, getting almost hysterical with her emotions.

She was standing in the middle of the room, tottering almost—that poor friendless orphan. Some one humanely rushes with a chair, barely in time. The girls group round her. The youth stands over her with an air of protection. Mr. Franklyn, naturally a just and humane man, feels strangely uncomfortable. The hands of all present, children of his as they are, are against him. He goes up to her, and takes her hand :

‘Jenny,’ he says, ‘I acquit you ; indeed I do. Do not set me down as so harsh. These things sometimes cannot be helped—there is a fate in them. But I say, indeed, I do acquit you of all share in this.’

Jenny had glided down upon her knees, and

had now his hand in hers, pressing it to her lips. 'Thanks, thanks,' she said, in a low voice, 'what goodness, how gracious! Now, *now* I can go away; you have taken a load from my heart.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Franklyn, raising her up, 'there is no need of that. Let us look at the thing rationally. Charles here knows—*knows*—he *must* see it cannot be—it is out of the question. He might as well send me to a prison.'

The youth smiled.

'You were talking to me, sir, only a week ago of our flourishing condition, of cheque-books and balances. I was given to understand the estate was getting cleared,' he added, scornfully.

'I said it would be cleared,' said Mr. Franklyn, warmly, 'subject to your marriage. Besides, I am not to be brought to account for every careless word. I tell you again, you can't afford to marry in this sort of way. O Charles, listen to your poor father! I did not mean to speak harshly to you, indeed I did

not. But we must have money. We stand in a frightful way. Miss Marley's fortune——'

'I don't want wealth,' said the youth, 'nor estates. All I care for is the girl I love, and——'

Mr. Franklyn, for about the second or third time in his life, tried a sneer. 'And a cottage,' he added.

'Yes, sir,' said the youth. (All the parties, during this distressing interview, were on the verge of explosion at any instant.) 'Yes, sir,' broke out the youth, 'in a cottage. I am not ashamed of such a wish. It is no discredit to me. I have never, thank God, been a blind worshipper of money. That is not my creed, I assure you. I shall——'

'Hush, hush!' said Jenny, supplicating, for the voices were getting loud; 'do not, I beseech you. Let me go, let me leave at once; I never thought of this.'

'Courage, Jenny,' said the youth, taking her hand; 'and if you do go, there shall be one to comfort and protect you. Look up!'

'No, no,' said Jenny, releasing herself. 'He

is your father—my benefactor and your father ; you must consult him—*his* wishes before all.'

'I am tired of all this,' said poor worried Mr. Franklyn. 'Take your own course, go on in your infatuation and folly ; see what it will lead you to,—be a beggar if you will.'

'Oh, sir ! do not speak in that way,' said Jenny, very generously interceding, though she did not know but that she would be drawing down wrath upon herself. But it was not her way to heed such considerations.

'Let him do as he pleases,' said Mr. Franklyn, about leaving the room, 'but he will rue it. Let him disobey his father, and bring me to a gaol. What does he care.'

'No, sir,' said the youth, again in a hot fit of heroics. 'I know my duty as well as most sons. I think you have never had much to complain of in me. It is ungenerous. But as you thwart me in the dearest wish of my heart, what I have dreamt of for years—for months,' he said, correcting himself ; in fact, it was strictly but a couple of months—'I shall be passive, quite passive in the business. You

shall send me back at once to India, to my regiment, to that climate which agrees with me so well. I shall go to-morrow, and leave a country that is odious to me.'

At the news of this dreadful determination, consternation fell upon the entire assembly. It was known that a board of Indian doctors had sat upon the person of the youth, and had pronounced that the climate of that country would be utterly fatal—that he must get home with what convenient speed he could. The youth had, therefore, in so many words calmly announced that he was going back to certain death.

Mr. Franklyn abruptly quitted the room, and after a few seconds the door below was heard to shut with a reverberating echo. The remaining actors in this distressing household piece stood regarding each other. It was a grim, horrid night—looked back to for long after as to a nightmare. The youth strode up and down, pacing defiance, and repeating his grand determination of self-murder. Jenny Bell lay back on her chair staring vacantly,


and almost stupified. Poor child! innocent *fons et origo* of all these troubles. Even the sympathising sisters had fallen away from her with a species of dread, for they felt that it was coming to extremities.

It was long past midnight, and time for the scene to close.

CHAPTER IX.

SURRENDER.

IN the grey of the morning candles were lighted, and a straggling hand-to-mouth sort of breakfast set out in the back parlour—hot and yet cold, raw and uncomfortable,—all for Jenny Bell, now departing. Even to the last the girls conjured her to stay,—these sad difficulties would pass by, but she was sternly inflexible. They wept profusely. She did not shed a tear, but was remarked to have a stony fixed stare, almost unnatural. She said it was her duty to go; her heart might break, as indeed it was likely to do, but go she must. After all, it *was* a ‘trying pass to come to,’ for our Jenny was, indeed, next door to a pauper, and had scarcely a place, according to the



hackneyed formula, where she might lay her head. These people, too, had been kind to her, and otherwise she might have had a home here for Heaven knows how long. So that this exodus was indeed a practical piece of heroism, for which she must have credit. Poor Jenny!

Mr. Franklyn was not seen or heard of. He was supposed to be up, for a note was brought in from him and given to Jenny. Poor child, she opened it eagerly. It contained best wishes, and so forth, with a very handsome money present, very princely indeed considering the fortunes of the family. Jenny said merely, 'How good;' but did not, as might have been expected, make any noisy disclaimer. But it was found after she was gone, that it had been left behind on her table, with a grateful note for Mr. Franklyn. Oh, such a grateful note! She was to write, write often; *they* were to write, write *very* often. For the present she was only going to a town some fifty miles away by rail, where was some fossil relation—bones, as it were, in the drift. That was all that was known for the present. HE in

whose hands she would direct all for the best.

The carriage was at the door. A cold, raw blueness was seen over the trees. The candles burned with a melancholy flare. A single maid was up, and, pattering up and down, bestowed the last final offices—not, indeed, with enthusiasm, but with faint hopes of pecuniary comfort from the departing lady. The male servant was on duty, but with reluctance—for he, too, with a profounder knowledge of human nature, had but poor hopes. There was but a low estimate of Jenny, in this respect, through the establishment. And yet they misjudged her. Jenny was very sensible. She knew that no capital is laid out at such judicious interest as when placed in the Securities known as ‘Servants’ Vails.’ She astounded the menial at the door with a handsome *honorarium*.

At last it has come. See Jenny going forth upon the world;—see her, a young Roman matron, sacrificing herself for a family! In our century these instances are uncommon.

Young Mr. Franklyn has asked for a few

moments' speech in private. But Jenny thinks it more delicate firmly to decline. Her address and place of abode is, as it were, wrung from her.

'I will write to you, Jenny,' said the frantic young officer. '*That* cannot be prevented—and—and—I will be true to you for ever!'

She shook her head sadly. Better strive and forget her, for *both* their sakes,—far better. One last favour—try and carry out his dear father's wishes. Would he promise her?

Anything but that. He takes her down to the carriage, supporting her on his arm. He walked with pride. *That* last office, at least, they should not take from him.

The girls followed behind, admiring his chivalry with a secret admiration. Some one carried a flaring light at the tail of the dismal procession. The male servant stood, 'carrying arms,' as it were, at the open hall door, out of respect for the liberal view taken of his services—but shivering. It was very cold indeed.

Embracing them all round—a clutch rather

than an embrace,—a close adherence, as though they were never to be parted again. The youth took her out to the carriage.

‘Ah, darling Charlotte! I had forgotten her,’ said Jenny. ‘Give her my love—be *sure* you give her my love. And now, good-bye, dear Mr. Franklyn! Your kindness, and—and’—Jenny hesitated—‘generous partiality—I shall never—*never* forget.’

‘Angel!’ said the young man, half in at the carriage, ‘you shall hear or see of me again, before long.’

Jenny shook her head sadly, and drove away into the darkness.

Another wretched day, a day of gloom and misery, looked back to with a shudder by the family. Poor feeble-minded Mr. Franklyn was at his wits’ end secretly, yet outwardly was wrapped up in a paletot of moodiness. For there was another departure getting ready.

Tin cases were in the hall, and that special pannier-shaped baggage, which is for the Overland, rested ominously on hall chairs; sticks,

umbrellas, sword, fishing-rod, all strapped together like a Roman Lictor's fasces,—bundles of plaids and general wrapping, as though it were Christmas, and a blanket distribution among the poor were speedily to take place. Yes, young Franklyn was going away tragically, like a transpontine hero—rushing to certain death in the country of Curry. He was calm, and made no speeches; his sisters regarded him with awe, and even terror, but they did not dare to address him. Mr. Franklyn, too, did not appear, but kept himself secret, like a Grand Llama. Wretched day, indeed!

It came to dinner time. The chaise was to be at the door at 7 P.M., the same chaise that had taken away our poor Jenny Bell. The hero snatched a few mouthfuls,—he did not care to eat. What indeed *was* eating as a function of life, to one who was rushing to certain death? Certain death it was, say within eight or ten months—Porson had said so—our liver, my dear sir, you understand. The frugal banquet was washed down with

tears and sobs, and the youth then got up hastily to get ready the last few preparations.

All then met in the hall.

Then forth came Mr. Franklyn, really ghastly pale and tottering—the first time he had been seen that day. He met his son full at the door. The son started back.

‘You are going then, Charles,’ said he.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the other.

‘Determined to—to—break my heart, to carry out your own views.’

‘No, no, sir,’ said his son. ‘Don’t misunderstand me. I am doing all that you wish, sacrificing everything, even life itself, to——’

‘I understand. Of course,’ said Mr. Franklyn, smiling bitterly, ‘you must have your way. Stay then. Do as you please; marry whom you will; I have no more spirit to oppose you.’

‘No,’ said the hero. ‘You shall find me dutiful. Let me go back to the Indies; an unwilling consent——’

‘I am serious,’ said Mr. Franklyn. ‘I had no aim in the world but your good—’

none, upon my soul! Our good, I should say. My dear boy, you know not what is involved in this step. I am no family tyrant; but pause, I do conjure you, before you take this wretched, fatal step!

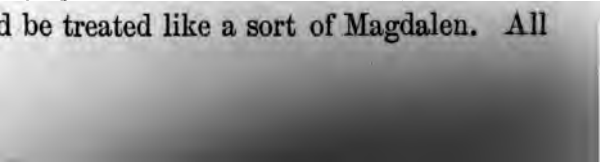
‘I can say no more,’ said the son, coldly. ‘I can do no more than obey you.’ And he pointed to his mails ready packed in the hall.

Mr. Franklyn looked at him a moment sadly, then said, ‘Take these things up to the rooms again.’

CHAPTER X.


JENNY'S WANDERINGS.

WE may well fancy what a miserable, desolate sort of a journey was that made by Jenny Bell all that day, and what a cold, dejected heart she must have taken with her. It was at best a decent sort of expulsion ; and unless she was supported by the conscious rectitude of the step she was taking, and that grandest of all moral sustenance, *principle*, it is hard to say how she would have got through at all. Only consider, a lonely, impoverished, young creature, without a friend, without comfort, and with a blank waste of a future before her, hurrying away to a sort of fossilized relation, to a dry, prison sort of household, where she would be treated like a sort of Magdalen. All



the soft, warm colours of life were fast fading out; she was every instant leaving a greater span between her and her dear friends.

Towards evening she came to the town where she was to halt for the night—a rude, raw, grimy place of abode, manufacturing through and through, and with a general tone of dull Indian red. Not a zephyr of sympathy fluttered down those grim gaol-like streets. It seemed a gathering of vast walls and a whole army of windows. It was all duress and restraint—all cold, hard, ironed—mechanical, monstrous, regular, noisy — unsavoury and sombre, with not a glimpse of anything soft, gracious, natural, or human. Men and women who were machines, like the machines they looked after, crowded at corners—heavy hulking figures, who now that work was done, began to live in their own stagnant way. The manufacturing town was beginning to draw a sort of languid material breath of life, as lonely Jenny Bell drove through its streets, to the ‘Queen’s Hotel,’ a clean, bright, white house of entertainment, actually reeking of fresh plaster.



A new, cold, Hotel Palace—Limited: very white inside—very rich in cornices, pillars, and entablatures, all in the most solid confectionery plaster that could be got. There was a hoist for taking up luggage to the different apartments, and electric telegraphy for communicating with the servants; a spacious ‘Ladies’ Coffee-room,’ a library, and other inventions. Yet, somehow, it was a cold, cheerless, factory sort of hotel, quite in keeping with the factories among which it was set down.

A dreary welcome for a young creature. We may well conceive what an evening she passed; how she watered her simple crust—that is, the plain delicacies sent up to her from the ‘Queen’s’ kitchen—with tears. We may fancy what a night she spent, and how sadly she sat in her chamber, and waited for the hour when she was to go forward another stage.

What time that was fixed for, did not appear very clearly. ‘It was not known to the servants of the house, nor to the landlord of the house, who had not been told to send in that very modest account, run up from the day

before, and whose extent did not tend to preserve that sense of honour and respect which in the Inn world is only to be acquired by large and liberal outlay. Possibly this indefinite date was not known to herself; but this is certain, the whole of that weary day she sat patiently in the manufacturing hotel, in the manufacturing town, perched high in a sort of eyrie or roost, known as No. 160, and attainable only by Alps upon Alps of stairs. There was a printed tariff, with the various 'Scales of Rooms' set down; and Jenny had chosen the most lowly. The waiter mountaineers made the ascent with ill-concealed disgust. There she sat the whole day, at the little window, looking down on the wains of wool crawling by with the solemn gait of elephants, and the rude iron natives, trudging past roughly, and on the bare red brick opposite, and the stiff, gaunt, soulless houses. It was a dreary wait for that poor outcast girl, yet who might, indeed, be there as well as elsewhere.

Evening then came on, and a reasonable speculation was abroad in the crypts below as

to whether there would be any strain put upon their resources for No. 160.

Towards six o'clock, she still sitting in solitary retreat, a waiter mountaineer struggled up to her Grand Mulets, and tapping at the door, said there was a lady and gentleman in the 'Ladies' Coffee-room' who wished to see her. Our patient Jenny did not start, but said, 'Thank you,' very sweetly, raised her eyes to Heaven with utter thankfulness, and, when the door had closed, stole over to the chimney-piece, and vacantly smoothed down her hair, with that almost instinctive prompting of the woman nature whenever she is suddenly drawn before the public. This unfriended outcast had, indeed, need of every weapon in the whole armoury of female trickeries.

And who could these strangers be, waiting in the 'Ladies' Coffee-room?' The poor unfriended girl, tripping down slowly, may well speculate who could want her in the dreary manufacturing town. Who, indeed?

Standing in the 'Ladies' Coffee-room,' where happily at this moment there are no ladies, is

the faithful knight, so true, so trusting, and so loving—the brave young Charles—and his sister.

She gives a little scream as she sees him : it is so sudden. For a friendless girl, here is one friend at least !—and then falls on the neck of the sister.

Jenny put out her hand, while a flush came to her cheek.

‘This is kind,’ she said, in her low, soft voice, for she was agitated, ‘very kind. I did not expect this.’

The youth stammered and coloured, himself; for he had all the engaging unsteadiness of youth, and the ‘ingenuus pudor,’ and was not quite prepared for the situation.

‘So,’ murmured Jenny, ‘you have wished to see me once more ! This is kind—oh, most kind !’

‘Jenny,’ said the youth, with a blunt roughness which became him wonderfully, ‘you are coming back, you know. That is, it is all settled; and—and—you are to come back.’

‘Yes, dear,’ said the girl, ‘you are to come back. Papa wishes it.’

She looked at them with wonder, scarcely following their meaning, then shook her head sadly and slowly. From those divine tresses were shaken forth upon the worshipping youth a sort of ambrosial essence.

‘No, no,’ she said, ‘those happy times are gone for ever. It is very good of you—oh, so good of you—to wish it; but you know after what has passed, it *may* not be! I must go my own way, out into the desert; while you——’

‘Dearest Jenny,’ said the youth, in an ardour of enthusiasm impossible to describe, ‘you do not understand. It is all settled—all forgiven—you are to come back.’

‘Yes, darling Jenny,’ said the sister. ‘Papa has agreed; so pack up your things at once. We are all dying to have you again.’

Over Jenny’s face played a smile of affection inexpressibly sweet. Once more their mutual feelings found a happy issue in a strict em-

brace. But raising herself from the girl's shoulder, Jenny said, sadly but firmly—

‘You are all too good—far too good! I knew dear Mr. Franklyn would do me justice when his noble heart had leisure to think of it. But it cannot be,—it must not!’

‘How do you mean?’ said the two together.

‘It is impossible that I should return, after—after—what has occurred. I—I—to bring confusion and discord into your united family! Never! The worst is over now. Better a thousand times that I should starve!’

It struck the youth that there was an air of noble resolution in her face, such as he never could have conceived. He surveyed her with wonder and admiration.

They were with her for more than an hour, wearying her with affectionate importunity. There was not an abundance of argument, for they were very young. But she was inflexible—almost sternly inflexible. They had actually to go their way at last, wringing from her a promise—to her a meaningless promise, given

out of love for these two affectionate souls—that she would tarry there—thinking it over—until the morrow's evening. Even of this little favour she made much, but she could not refuse these faithful, generous creatures. And so she agreed to tarry at the manufacturing town, in the blank manufacturing hotel, one day, for some indistinct whim of theirs.

They departed. The next day went by slowly, and our Jenny kept lonely watch up in her eyrie hour after hour. Never was so patient a scout. Late in the evening a cab drove up; and word was brought that there were parties in the 'Ladies' coffee-room' once more—an elderly gentleman, and the same parties that were there the day before.

Down came our Jenny—as to impending execution. Here was Mr. Franklyn, not austere, or stern, but gentle and forgiving, and melancholy. She was ready to sink down at his feet, but he caught her with both hands, barely in time.

'It seems you must come back, Jenny,' he

said. 'I have come for you myself. Charles' heart is so set upon it, that I will not oppose him any further. I don't think it a very wise step, but I consent. So, in God's name, come, and let us try and make the best of it.'

'He is the best of fathers,' said the youth. 'He has forgiven everything, and has consented: so come.'

The scene that followed it would be hard to describe.

Our Jenny was stern and inflexible, not to be swayed by arguments or entreaties. She held out nobly; and really won over Mr. Franklyn in what was with him a faint reflection of enthusiasm. He at last was actually joining in the other entreaties; and finally, after more than an hour, she gave way, and reluctantly went up stairs to put back her slender wardrobe into her modest chest.

The poor outcast was brought away, and re-entered the old mansion of the Franklyns with a sort of triumph—for her, that is; for the rest of the family now seemed to welcome her with a sort of awe and mystery, and even shyness

.

This was hard, for she had indeed been brought back under pressure. But she was now a sort of mistress of the house *in posse*; and in a week's time it was understood over the neighbourhood that she was the affianced bride of young Mr. Charles Franklyn.

CHAPTER XI.

A DISTRACTED CLERIC.

THE whole country, in amazement and yet in delight, welcomed the story. It was sent round in an incredibly short space of time, like the Fiery Cross. We are to love our neighbours, and search our consciences at night, for anything contrary to that precept of charity. Still, how welcome the news—not of his misfortune, Heaven forbid—but of his merely tripping over a stone, and stepping into a social puddle and being splashed!

People had been to the house of the Franklyns and seen Jenny Bell there. Some had always thought her a forward person; some a retiring creature, so sly and quiet, and just the one to accomplish such a stroke. Some, smarting

under that universal wound, which the withdrawal of a desirable single man from the community always induces—even where there has been no individual loss or chance of loss—were loudly indignant, and made no secret of their wrongs. A pert, brazen creature—an adventuress—an artful minx—a privateer: these awful words were heard through some country houses.

Elderly persons now whispered to other elderly persons, with complacent condolence, that it was a great pity, a very great pity; for Franklyn had been gradually getting straight, but that he would never get over this. One special elderly person knew his property, sir, about as well—as—anybody; but depend upon it this unlucky business would swamp him.

It was notorious in the country that the Franklyn barque was gotten among the shoals and breakers of pecuniary difficulty, and had there strained her timbers seriously, and was otherwise distressed. No one had, indeed, official notice of any such casualty out on the social high seas; nor had the agents for gossip

at the parish Lloyd's yet received information of any misfortune. Still, there was that mysterious instinct abroad—akin to those rumours of defeat and misfortune, which unaccountably fill the air long before telegraphic wires have brought in the news,—that there was rottenness somewhere in the fortunes of the Franklyn family, and the neighbours were looking greedily for the waters to come rushing in.

It was the old story. The good old family barque had been floated down from generation to generation, but with every voyage was getting more and more 'fouled' with the crustacea of mortgages and heavier charges. Each successor was more or less blameless, but was obliged to make fresh incumbrances to meet the existing burden of incumbrances that already weighed on him. It was the old story. There was nothing to show for all this expenditure; and those who were reputed to have spent most money, had the least enjoyment of any while they spent. Mr. Franklyn did not game, or race, or keep hounds, or even

ride to hounds. Yet he was growing more and more terribly embarrassed every day. There is no more dispiriting spectacle than this of a genteel family wasting by a slow but sure decay, with a sad pilot at the helm, who is struggling ineffectually.

Up at the Franklyns' there was a cloud of gloom and oppression, impossible to describe. The members of the family moved about as though there had been some recent domestic affliction, and the 'remains' were lying in state in every chamber in the castle. When the first short burst of enthusiasm on our Jenny's return was past, this dreary tone gradually took its place. It was felt universally that some terrible misfortune had overtaken them; and yet, than our Jenny's deportment, in her most trying position, nothing could be more delicate or appropriate. She kept very retired and to the full as dismal as the rest, wept regularly for several hours during the day, and conveyed the idea that she was a fatal, yet unwilling instrument in the hands of stern Ananke, or the pagan Necessity. Poor child, of that

terrible power, or its great name, she knew nothing.

The youth deported himself curiously, and, it must be said, with not nearly her delicacy. He seemed conscious of the troubles his foolish purpose was to bring upon the family, and looked no one in the face, relapsing into a dogged demeanour; but he haunted his Jenny, and found indemnity there. He fastened on one of his hapless sisters, and outpoured upon her daily rhapsodical panegyrics of the virtues and beauties of his dear charmer. The child, for she was not very much more, had to listen, wanting heart even to protest. In short, the sum and compliment of gloom and apprehension, and heavy weight upon the heart, if added up, according to arithmetical rule, would have made a very serious total.

There was one thing they were all looking forward to, which was to be a relief and a kind of cheer. The eldest sister of the house was coming home—was, in fact, to be home to-morrow. Charlotte, the good Queen Charlotte of the mansion, upon whom, since the night

Mrs. Franklyn had left the Franklyns for ever, the head of the house leant affectionately, for all purposes of serious government.

A girl of 'great sense,' everybody said; thoughtful, firm; one as against whom the waves of society would be broken into spray. One, too, that reflected a second or so before she spoke, and measured what might be the purpose of the speaker. This was the girl that came home of the Saturday night (about seven days after Jenny's return), from her visit at the Cravens'—Sir Welbore Craven of that ilk; returned with all her baggage, *matériel*, and munitions of war.

A letter had told her what had befallen her family in her absence. Mr. Franklyn had written a bitter, almost despairing note, on which she quickened her departure.

Her welcome was universal—some cheer was spread abroad. It seemed to be understood that mind and stability were come back once more into the mansion. Faces lightened as she entered, and a sort of public confidence was restored. They would not be wholly wrecked.

The sensible girl accepted the situation readily, and said, 'We must all make the best of it now.' She had a long talk with her father in the study, and reassured him. A short series of encouraging looks, and very few words indeed, more than reassured the girls; it was enough that she was with them. But to her brother, who stood off at first shyly and almost guiltily, she conducted herself with a tenderness and delicacy that was wonderful, and finally gained him to her. She was the universal peacemaker.

To Jenny Bell, who was now so humble, so grateful, so obliging, so imploring to every single person in the house, from chief to scullion, she was especially gracious and encouraging. She seemed to ask her confidence, and no doubt felt for the delicacy and awkwardness of her position, being forced by an unwilling family to enter their ranks. Yet, some way in Jenny's demeanour towards *her* there was a constraint—an overdoing of the humilities. For, perhaps, she felt that the plain, sensible girl, who was so calm and straightforward, would put an

ugly construction on her conduct, and misconstrue cruelly her own really fair and upright behaviour. It is not known whether this was indeed the secret feeling of the 'sensible girl,' but she was strictly just, and behaved to her with perfect impartiality.

No day was fixed for the marriage as yet; for, to say the truth, there was no very marvellous enthusiasm in the family to hurry it on. The youth, Charles, his transports being now more or less satisfied, had delicacy enough not to importune them too eagerly. There was no need for haste. And as for that poor suffering Jenny, it was obvious she was least likely of the whole company to be eager for any special time to be named.

In this way the time passed by for a week or more, and all in the house seemed to have grown used to the idea of what was now an inevitable necessity.

The Reverend Charlton Wells, the lovesick curate, lived in the little town in lodgings, over the shop of the local apothecary,—for the present, at least. The rector was getting altera-

tions done at his house, 'throwing out' rooms, and had no accommodation for him at present. The little town was good three miles away from the house of the Franklyns, so he lived a very dreary, lonely existence in that dead-alive country town, over the apothecary's shop. This was his normal view; but when he fell into that peculiar frame of mind in reference to Miss Bell, this sense of abandonment and desolation increased to a degree that the interior became of a sudden dismantled utterly, the walls stripped and barren, and the whole turned into the best reproduction conceivable of a prison cell. He himself, too, became a reproduction of a prisoner dwelling in the prison cell, and looked out from its mean windows on the country-town street with the weariest heart. He viewed with a sort of loathing the dwarfed economy, the mere elementary traffic of the little community, the balls of string, the salt boxes, the open sack of flour, the starch and soap, and other insignificant items of traffic which constituted the stock of the leading establishment. The Franklyn

Arms, next door, was no more than a miserable public. These features had struck his eye long, long before, but were endured with rational and pious toleration. But the whole was but a development of prison life and cellular system, and genuine back-of-God-speed existence.

Since the eventful night at the Franklyns' house, when the Archdeacon had dined there, and which, when the guests were gone, had wound up so dramatically, the Rev. Charlton had been away at the furthest corner of the county for a few days,—had gone with reluctance and returned upon wings. Then it was he heard of the break-up, and heard, too, of Jenny's departure. Then his parochial duties, his fishing duties, his fine broad healthy enjoyment of country life—in fact, life itself generally—became utterly distasteful. He was crushed and almost desperate.

Joy came with Jenny's return. But with her came also the nuptial news, and the curate was crushed down once more.

On the Sunday came round his turn to

preach ; but a wretched performance he made of it. He came forth from the vestry all drooping and deranged, as though his ecclesiastical plumage were draggled and ruffled. He saw Jenny very distinctly below in the family pew, sitting there in a sort of modest tribulation, yet clearly with the halo or *nimbus* of affianceship about her head. With this encouragement, he took his rustic hearers, very indifferently, through some poor religious maunderings—the Gospel - and - water, as it were. Theologians of the congregation thought it miserable doctrine, and did not know what was coming over Charlton Wells.

That Sunday, after lunch, Miss Bell had stolen away to the garden, to the summer-house for solitude, as was, indeed, her wont—for some way, since the arrival of the sister, there had grown up a gradual constraint between her and all the members of the family. She sat in the summer-house thinking—who shall divine what she was thinking of?—when in a moment the figure of the Rev. Charlton Wells, with much agitation and a little wild-

ness in his face, came round a turn in the walk, and stood before her.

She started. No wonder; an agitated cleric like this was disturbing.

‘Mr. Charlton!’ she said, ‘I am so glad—that is—it is some time since we have seen you.’

‘Miss Bell,’ said he, ‘I wished to see you—to speak with you. I hear such strange things;—that you had left—that you are to be married.’

Jenny hung down her head in the summer-house. She must have long ago divined that here was one of those hapless mortals whom it was to be her destiny to distress—Heaven knows how unwillingly.

‘I want to know the truth,’ said the agitated clergyman, ‘from yourself—that is. Speak to me—tell me all—for you do not know how deeply interested I am.’

Jenny half rose up to go away.

‘One moment,’ said the Reverend Charlton. ‘You would not be so cruel?’

‘Cruel!’ said Jenny, again drooping her

head. 'How little you know me! Ah, you are outside; you go about the world—the world of your parish, mix with men, and are busy with the holy concerns of your sacred calling. Ah, you cannot so much as guess at *our* sorrows—we who are within in a genteel prison—how we suffer, and must not complain.'

The Reverend Charlton answered bitterly—

'Suffer? Yes; what tremendous griefs these are, which consist of station, wealthy position, and a good alliance. Then it is true?'

'Oh,' said Jenny again, 'how little do you know *me*, Mr. Charlton; me, the poor, humble outcast, dependent on others' bounty. To think that such vile seductions would tempt me. I say again, you know not what is *passing*—what *has* passed within. What has been *my* life, what *must* be the life of such as I am, from the beginning? Sacrifice—nothing but sacrifice—a wholesale strangling of our will, inclinations, and affections.'

Jenny's eyes flashed, Jenny's cheeks flamed with colour, Jenny herself sank back upon the rude rustic bench of the summer-house, and once more hung down her head.

The clergyman exclaimed with rapture—

‘What! do I understand that——’

‘No, no, no,’ Jenny said, eagerly. ‘You are to understand nothing. I have said too much. Oh, forget, forget these words; I did not mean to be so open; I did not indeed.’

‘I know, I know,’ said the curate, rapturously. ‘It escaped you involuntarily—I suspected it. Dear, dearest Jenny, let me——’

‘Hush, hush,’ said Jenny, rising in much alarm; ‘I must go—they will be missing me—asking for me. I must be at my post—you understand—you know what is expected from me. Oh, but you must forget those incautious words; never think of them again.’

‘Never think of them again!’ said the clergyman, with fervour. ‘No, anything but that; thanks, a thousand thanks, for this confession. It has taken a load off my heart.’

The eyes of Jenny sought him with a sort of wonder.

‘Confession?’ she said; ‘you must have misunderstood——’

‘Thanks; I see,’ he said. ‘I am not quick; I do not take a thing quickly, but I mean well; I do, indeed. But—but this sacrifice must not be allowed to go on. They—these people, must not be suffered to take advantage of your gentle and too-yielding nature. Some one must interfere; I will. They would not dare——’

‘Hush, hush, hush!’ said Jenny. ‘What wildness is this! Take care, I conjure you. You know not what you are doing. A touch, an incautious breath, and I am ruined—lost for ever. No, no, no,’ said Jenny, in the deepest despondency; ‘it is kind, most kind, but unavailing. The hand of man cannot help me now. The only possible course left is to—wait, to watch; to wait and watch. And you,’ added Jenny, devoutly looking up to the rude bark branches which formed the roof of the summer-house; ‘you will pray.’

She put her fingers to her lips and passed out, leaving behind her the figure of the clergyman, wondering, perplexed, and yet, on the whole, much relieved.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. CROWLE.

THAT Sunday there was the family dinner-party. Mr. Crowle, who came out by railway from the manufacturing town where poor Jenny had spent such mournful hours, dined also. He arrived about half an hour before dinner, found no one in the drawing-rooms, and amused himself making exploring expeditions through that unknown country, turning over books, unscrewing puzzles, unlocking caskets, and, on the whole, amusing himself very pleasantly. Presently, he hears a step approaching, and drops into an arm-chair, and is found very busy with a large quarto photographic album.

Miss Bell was never late, and never kept

any one waiting. She always, therefore, allowed a margin, for fear of an accident. It did not do, she was accustomed to say, for people in *her* station to run any risks. Here she was, dressed, and a full half an hour before the rest. *Their* margin would be on the other side, but, of course, *they* were in a different station.

‘Ah, Miss Bell, Miss Bell,’ said the young man of business, gaily. ‘You have been just looking out on me from a little cardboard window, here,’ and he held up the quarto photographic missal; ‘and now you rise before me, as if I had called you up by an incantation. Let me congratulate you heartily, sincerely, on the joyful event.’

Jenny looked at him reproachfully, as who should say, ‘Have I not sufficient misfortunes without this cruel raillery?’

‘Congratulate?’ she said, appealingly. (It was a favourite mode with Jenny of carrying on a conversation, to repeat the last word of the preceding speaker, with a different intonation.) ‘Congratulate?’ said she, reproachfully.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Crowle; ‘why not? Why not, now? Here is a suitable alliance—what is called “a good match,”—all the neighbours call it so, and consider Miss Bell fortunate. Why not? Let me offer you a chair.’

There was something in Mr. Crowle’s manner which seemed to say, ‘I wish to talk to you;’ and there was something in Mr. Crowle’s manner which seemed to say, ‘You will please to obey me.’ Jenny Bell looked about her anxiously, as though for an opportunity to flutter away, but sat down upon a sofa, obedient.

‘Why not? I say again,’ asked Mr. Crowle nursing his knee, and looking quite a boy-man of business.

‘Oh,’ said Miss Bell, ‘I’m sure I should be so grateful—so thankful—it is far too great a blessing for me; but, Mr. Crowle, it is the—the—intrusion into a kind, amiable family—a family that has *loaded* me with benefits that——’

‘I see,’ said Mr. Crowle, positively looking no older than the cherub of one of the old masters; it was wonderful how persons could

have any confidence in one of his years. 'I see. No wonder, Miss Bell; a most natural feeling. Of course you like our young friend?'

Miss Bell looked up to the cord of the lustre, as to heaven—an answer uncertain, and void, as the lawyers say, for generality.

'He worships you with a strong passion; you return that affection—why not? He is good-looking, young, generous, brave, and what not.'

Jenny again looked at the lustre-cord in the same general fashion.

'You love him, in short,' continued Mr. Crowle; 'you are not indisposed to the alliance itself, which is reputed a good one—mark, I say, *reputed* a good one, and yet you are ready, at this moment, to sacrifice all—I am sure you are—all—prospects,—the youth, station, everything,—sooner than wound this amiable family. Most generous and most noble on your part, and, I must say, but seldom witnessed. I should not believe it if it was told to me.'

Our Jenny surveyed the young man of business a little uneasily.

‘Oh yes!’ she murmured, devoutly, ‘willingly, cheerfully.’

‘It was the strangest thing from the beginning,’ said Mr. Crowle, thoughtfully; ‘so sudden—so unexpectedly, so mysteriously forced upon you.’

‘Oh yes,’ sighed Jenny.

‘You had been pursued—captured, as it were—brought from a neighbouring town; so I am given to understand?’

‘Oh yes,’ murmured Jenny.

‘And yet,’ added Mr. Crowle, as if he was adding another to the Rochefoucauld maxims, ‘sudden things are often as precarious as sudden. There is no knowing what is in the future. I should be afraid lest your darling wishes should, after all, be gratified, and this odious alliance averted.’

Jenny started—gave, in fact, a violent conspicuous start.

‘Don’t die of premature joy,’ he said, smiling. ‘I fancy you think that news too good to be true. No—I know nothing. I have no right to say anything. I don’t say what I might

do,' he added, actually smiling himself into infancy, 'if I were your enemy.'

'If you were my enemy!' said Jenny, timidously, clasping her hands, and getting seriously alarmed at this strange mood of Mr. Crowle's, —'if you were my enemy!'

'If I was your enemy!' said he. 'Does not the supposition amuse you? I am merely putting a case. You must know that a person in *my* position towards Mr. Franklyn and his affairs—a sort of genteel scavenger, in fact—must have a certain power. Any family arrangement could scarcely go forward without my—say my report upon it, which in this case would be unfavourable—if I were your enemy.'

'Oh Mr. Crowle,' said Jenny, 'you are hinting at something dreadful.'

'Dreadful!' said the other; 'of course it is for the advantage of the family. What are riches compared with domestic happiness? Of course. What is vile lucre—is not that what they call it—what is vile lucre to the woman we love? A cottage before a palace any day.'

Home before the world! And so I, of course——’

Miss Bell was looking at him doubtfully, her eyes widening, and really not knowing how to answer.

‘But I am Miss Bell’s friend. I know she will make the young man happy. The only thing I fear is one thing. People in new stations are apt to forget old friends. You will grow proud, haughty, and, as Mrs. Charles Franklyn, keep Mr. Crowle at a distance.’

‘Oh no, no!’ said Jenny fervently, ‘never, never; you do not know me; you do not know me yet. You do not know Jenny Bell. Ingratitude is not part of her nature.’

‘Still,’ he added, musingly, ‘in your new position, you will want friends. No one can hold their own without friends; even an attractive young married woman.’

‘Oh,’ said Jenny, earnestly, ‘all *his* friends shall be mine. It shall be part of my duties to study that they shall like me,—if they would only,’ Jenny added, modestly, ‘be good

to teach me, to instruct me. I want advice sadly.'

'But I must have security,' said Mr. Crowle, gaily; 'material guarantees, as they say in the treaties, both from you and Mr. Charles. We will talk it over together again. Meanwhile, as one who is interested in you, and really wishes you well, I will tell you one thing: you are likely enough to be freed from this hateful alliance. You know that dear girl who has just come back—so sensible—so shrewd. Well, I half suspect *she* would be inclined to try and help you in the matter.'

'Help me,' said Jenny; 'how?'

'How? In furthering your dearest wishes—in putting an end to the whole affair. This is merely my idea. I merely mention it as the result of my imperfect observation. Dear me,' he added, 'it is wonderful the way people come to me. What *can* they see in me? I have so little experience—I want advice myself.'

'No, no, no,' said Jenny, 'you are so wise, so far-seeing.'

'Well, so our kind friend Mr. Franklyn

fancies; and tells me so. But that is his partiality. It is ridiculous, my dear Miss Bell, the way he depends on me. In this little business of yours, he came to me. "I leave it all with you," he said; "tell me what I am to do."

'Yes?' said Jenny, a little nervously.

'I said, "Let the young people have their way." To-morrow he will come to me and ask me, "Crowle, tell me what to do. Are we to let it go on?" and I shall tell him——'

'Yes?' said Jenny, anxiously.

'Well,' said Mr. Crowle, 'that depends—upon events. Conscientiously one must be guided by events, you know.'

'I have very few friends,' said Jenny, sadly. 'I want them sadly. I wish—I wish—you would be my friend, dear Mr. Crowle.'

'Well, it is a great honour; we shall see. I must try and deserve your friendship. Oh, here they are at last. Miss Charlotte, how do you do? Come back again? We have not seen you, I don't know when.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE 'SENSIBLE GIRL.'

IN they all trooped for the grand family meal. And there was welcoming and hand-shaking, and benevolent Sunday geniality. The family was plainly putting a constraint upon itself, and making believe in neighbours' eyes to be content with the match, and nothing could be more delicate than the way in which Mr. Franklyn behaved to Miss Bell. The misfortune, for so it was considered by them, was still remote, indefinite, and all these poor condemned ones had still what is called a 'long day' before them.

There was present the lovesick curate and his rector, the former something less dismal. There was present the family doctor and Mr.

Crowle just mentioned. Miss Charlotte, the newly-returned daughter, was the conversational centre to which the tongues and eyes of all present turned. Upon her was the bloom and freshness of the outer world; she was charged with such novelty as there was in the party. Even in the light world of talk, as in politics, that old law of the rising sun and its worship most strictly prevails. She sat next that brother she was so tenderly considerate to, and told her adventures partly to him, partly to the general world of the table. Mr. Crowle considerably took all the gaiety on himself, and whipped up the flagging steeds of talk. He good-naturedly took office, for that night only, as the Wamba of the party.

On the other side of Miss Charlotte was the Doctor and the Doctor's daughter; and these two, with her brother Charles, she laid herself out to entertain. She painted for them in detail all the polite orgies of that pleasant month or so she had spent at Cravenshurst, the ancestral seat of Sir Welbore Craven, Baronet; she dilated on his glories, not for any self-glori-

fiction, but because the simple minds of the Doctor and the Doctor's daughter relished such details hugely. Seventeen thousand a-year; prodigious state; innumerable horses; general magnificence. A genuine *old* place, with an ancient oak banqueting-hall, where men—that had been sleeping three hundred years in the parish, under what seemed to be monster hewn-stone caskets—had feasted. In the windows of that hall were mottled the gorgeous colouring of diaper; the chromo blazing of blues, Burgundy reds, and amber yellows and quarterings. Such quarterings! You could read the whole history of the family down in one of the windows! Such alliances—such choice streams of blue blood turned on to mingle with the family current from rich and invigorating sources. And now even a mere younger son of the house, with but a moderate patrimony, was eagerly sought by a neighbouring family, and the joint relatives were filled with joy. The Doctor and the Doctor's daughter were breathless with admiration. They feasted on these details.

Noble people were coming from afar to assist at the function. Who were the noble people? Why, Lord and Lady Mount Gingham, and Sir Thomas Skelper of Skelper, in the North; old Lord Wigbury, and many more. And yet he was but the younger son, which made it so curious.

Had Charlotte heard what settlements were to be made? (The whole table, even at a distance, was getting interested in Charlotte's series of clever pictures.) Well, they said, Sir Welbore was giving 'the young people' two thousand a year to begin with. Her fortune was twelve thousand pounds; and on the joint amount, it was thought they would be able to get along comfortably, for a time.

But the fun was the busy note of preparation—the fitting out of Craven Hall for the festival. Charlotte was quite sorry to come away. Upholsterers—carpenters—furnishing was to begin presently, Sir Welbore was so pleased with the match; and for a younger son it was very good.

'Certainly,' said the Doctor's daughter

family is a grand thing; blood is a grand thing; nothing, **NOTHING** like it!

Charlotte, no doubt feeling a little for her brother on the right, turns to him good-naturedly, and says softly to him—

‘Blood is *not* everything. Those painted windows and splendid alliances do not always bring happiness. Courage, dear Charlie; you in your little cottage will be as content as the prince in his palace.’

The youth had been listening a little ruefully to the gorgeous details, and he caught eagerly at what his sister said.

‘To be sure,’ he answered, brightening. ‘But why a cottage? Who was talking about cottages?’

‘Why,’ answered the sister, ‘surely with one you really love, and have chosen, you would not mind in what position in life you were! You know, my dear Charles, you will have to be thrifty, *very* thrifty. But what of that? I should not mind it if I was in your place.’

Jenny Bell, opposite, was talking away gaily

to her neighbour, yet moved a little restlessly, for she had a sort of instinct of what was being spoken; but Charlotte left the matter there.

The girls, however, were not inclined to leave the matter there, but came back to it with zest. They wished to know about the dresses, presents, lace veils, bridesmaids, and what not; and Charlotte had to take up the narrative again. The presents filled a room to themselves, into which visitors were taken for private adoration and admiration. Dressing-case from military brother; onyx bracelets from military cousin; exquisite *Sèvres*, an afternoon tea-service, from Viscount Hartleap; enamel locket, with initials worked in diamonds, for the bridesmaids all round—these from the bridegroom. And Sir Welbore, so pleased was he with the alliance, had made a splendid settlement on the happy couple.

This was all more or less *mal à propos*, and half the company saw it; but the girls were so eager and curious, it never occurred to them. But Charlotte was full of pity. Charlie had grown rueful again.

‘We shall have none of these fine things,’ he said in a low voice to her.

‘All vanities,’ said his sister; ‘all ministering to the pride of that family.’

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘and I dare say a mere mercenary marriage, arranged, as they call it, without a scrap of true love on either side.’

Charlotte shook her head.

‘I can’t say that. No; I never saw a pair so attached, not even you and poor little Jenny opposite. My dear Charles, it doesn’t follow because they have all these worldly blessings they are to be denied the happiness of liking one another; you are not to keep all the love for you and your Jenny. That would be a most unfair monopoly, wouldn’t it?’

Next day, after lunch, Miss Charlotte—the steady, sensible girl, who looked after the house, cast up accounts, and took but little in the way of pleasure—said she would ride out, and would Charlie ride with her? Charlie had but newly come in from a sort of duty-walk with his future bride; but said gladly enough

he would go. The future bride was up in her room writing, and from the window saw the pair ride by. The bright eyes shone brighter, and a curious distortion came upon the round, rosy face. Jealous? Jealous of the sister-in-law? Absurd! Yet there is no probing the mystery of these love emotions—its complications and entanglements. But she kissed hands to them sweetly, and nodded and nodded again with the perseverance of a porcelain mandarin, until they were well down the avenue, and out of sight.

'Poor Jenny,' said Charlotte. 'She is very fond of you. You must try and make her happy, Charlie.'

'Of course I shall,' said Charles.

'She must be treated very carefully—delicately, I should say,' continued Charlotte (they were walking their horses now). 'You won't mind taking a little bit of good advice from me—the wise old lady of the family. Eh, Charlie? You see her position is a peculiar one.'

'How do you mean?' said the youth. 'You know as my wife——'

‘Oh, of course,’ said she. ‘But you don’t understand. If she is sensitive—as I know she is—there will be an awkwardness about her—her former position, you know. And these things someway are always borne in mind by the world, however insignificant the parties.’

The youth got a little red. Charlotte saw the tip of the ear next her kindling.

‘I know all that very well,’ said he. ‘I don’t want to be reminded——’

‘My dear boy,’ said she, ‘I knew you would be cross. But I mean it for your good—it will save you endless annoyance afterwards. A bold, manly course will be the best. Laugh at the world—make no affectation of glossing it over. Speak of it boldly, and never be ashamed of what you have done.’

Again the tip of the youth’s ear kindled. ‘But why *should* I be ashamed?’ he said, indignantly. ‘I have done nothing wrong. I thought, in these times, it was more to a fellow’s credit to pick out the girl of his——’

‘Of course,’ said Charlotte, laughing. ‘The girl of his heart, by all means. And by the

way—another little bit of advice, my own dearest Charlie. You know I mean it for your good, and I must speak, if you will eat me up for it after——'

'Charlotte, dear, speak away. You have stuck to me all through like a brick, and I should be ashamed to say a word to you. Go ahead!'

'What I wanted to say was—now don't be angry—that I wouldn't in public, you know, before people, be getting in rhapsodies about the girl of your heart. You are doing very well, and what is creditable to you; but alas! the world—the cold, practical world—only laughs at anything like sentiment; and I am afraid, according to its old, heartless creed, thinks you are making but a poor business of it.'

There was silence for a long time.

'There,' said the sister; 'I know you are angry with me. I was foolish to have mentioned it.'

'No, no,' said Charles; 'but I think you mistake. The world is not quite so bad as *you*

make out. I have always been told that a generous action is sure in the end——’

‘To be its own reward, like virtue,’ she said, smiling. ‘Is that it? And so it shall, Charlie. And depend upon it, you will be very happy in the midst of little difficulties, and the pressure of a limited income. I am confident, Charlie,’ she added, affectionately, ‘when you get a little older and steadier, you will battle very successfully against any little trials you may encounter.’

Charlie said nothing for a full quarter of an hour. He looked gloomily down upon his horse’s mane. Coming near home, Charlotte said timidly—

‘Of course you will tell all this to the “girl of your heart”—eh, Charlie?—that I have been dispiriting and discouraging you?—but I think it is better you should *both* be prepared.’

‘Not I,’ said Charles, hastily. ‘I shall say nothing about it. What’s the use? Jenny will only begin looking downcast, or crying, perhaps.’

Jenny was up in her room writing still, when the pair returned. And the same curious twitch passed across her round cheek. Charlie did not go into the drawing-room and lounge there, as was his habit, but lit one of his Indian cheroots and went out into the garden, where he paced for nearly an hour. Towards dinner, he heard a soft step on the walk, and there was his Jenny in the shepherdess' hat, stealing towards him. They walked together up and down, Jenny amusing her future lord as best she could. She dwelt on the happiness that would shortly arrive for both—of their plans for housekeeping and internal order—for she really had a very pretty talent for picture-drawing and castle-building. Thus she gradually warmed him up into something like a little enthusiasm.

'Charlotte,' she said, when he proposed going in—it was *he* proposed it—'your sister Charlotte—she is very fond of you, oh, *so* fond—so good, so noble, so devoted!'

'Yes,' said he; 'she *does* like me, I believe.'

'Ah, she likes *you*,' said Jenny.

‘And likes *you*,’ said he.

Jenny shook her head.

‘Impossible,’ she said ; ‘how could she ? She has grand ideas about the dignity of your family. She wishes to see them raised yet higher in the world, and [she looks on me, naturally enough, as one who has fatally interfered with that. Oh, dear Charles, I am very unfortunate, very unhappy !’

Charles soothed her.

‘She is ambitious,’ Jenny went on ; ‘naturally so. She would wish to advance your family, and cannot understand those who are content with a little, and mere domestic peace. I admire her splendid nature, and wish I could be like her ; but I cannot. I do not care for those things.’

The youth was then thinking of what his sister had said during their ride.

‘Oh ! that is all very well, Jenny,’ he said, ‘but we shall have to rough it, they tell me—to save a little, you know, and look after every penny.’

Jenny smiled, and gave a curious look.

She sighed. 'No wonder they are cast down,' she said, 'and take a gloomy view; *I* should, were I in their place, and so would every woman. She is so fond of you, too,' continued Jenny. 'She thinks naturally you are thrown away upon poor lowly Jenny. And indeed I begin to be afraid so.'

'Afraid of what, Jenny?' said he, curiously.

'Oh, you know it,' said Jenny, dismally. 'She has always been accustomed to think for you—to guide the family—dear Mr. Franklyn being so busy. And this, this sad business, being done without—that is, when she was away, you see. Ah, you should have consulted her!'

'Consulted her!' said the youth, a little scornfully. 'I suppose, in an affair of this sort, I am old enough to choose for myself. Holding the Queen's commission, I *should* think——'

'But dear Charlotte was not consulted.'

'But why should she be, Jenny? I am a man. I am not under petticoat government. I am not——'

‘Oh, I am very wretched,’ said Jenny, with a sudden burst of grief. ‘It had much better not be! Disagreements in families! No; let me go and earn my bread—my crust, by honest labour.’

‘Never!’ said the youth, grandly. ‘My troth is plighted to you, Jenny. I am a soldier and a man of honour. You have a soldier’s troth, Jenny!’ And he led her in proudly, taking her arm in his, looking down on her to reassure her, much as the lovers lead off the stage the ladies they love.

He was very affectionate, even demonstrative, all the rest of that day, to his love, and looked a little distrustfully at the wise sister. To Jenny herself the wise sister was specially delicate, considerate, and attentive.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLOTTE VERSUS JENNY !

AFTER breakfast the next day, Charlotte called him over—‘Papa wants to speak with you,’ she said, ‘in his room. I am to go too.’

‘Oh ! I know,’ the youth sighed, ‘you are going to sermonize me. Surely, what is the use now ?’

‘You shall hear,’ said the wise sister. ‘Come !’ and they went out together.

Jenny looked after them from her desk, and a quick flash of distrust passed over her face. And yet, how little she knew the wise sister !

For she would have heard Mr. Franklyn saying to his son earnestly, ‘Charles, I want to speak with you. This business is going on a little too long. It is a very important

step you are taking, and must be treated seriously. I opposed it at first, but now that you have my consent, we must act like men about it. What day are you prepared to fix ?

‘Yes, Charles,’ said the wise girl; ‘you know papa has to arrange all his affairs, subject to this step.’

‘Would you like this day three months?’ said Mr. Franklyn. ‘That would give you ample time.’

There are some curious natures who do not like being pushed, ever so gently, into any step, even if they have an inclination for that step. The youth’s countenance fell, for he had this special repugnance.

‘But surely,’ he said, ‘father, there is no hurry.’

‘There is,’ said his father. ‘Besides, it is only due to the person you have chosen. She is to be your wife, and we must show her the same respect as though she were chosen from the nobility.’

Charlotte approved this speech, as being

in exactly the key that she would have put it.

‘We must treat her the same,’ she repeated, ‘as though she were our sister.’

‘In fact, I think three weeks would not be too soon, Charles,’ said the father; ‘there are no reasons for delay, no heavy settlements—no. In fact, it will be quite private. There is no need for any state or flourish.’

Here Charlotte sighed.

‘So, shall we say three weeks? I will engage that Mr. Crowle will not delay you.’

‘I see,’ said the youth, bitterly; ‘you wish to huddle me out of the way, as quickly as possible—I and my marriage. You wish to get rid of us. And yet, let me tell you, it is your own fault—all—for you were always telling me not to value money for its own sake, and all that sort of thing, and here now, I choose a good and virtuous girl——’

‘My dear boy,’ said Mr. Franklyn, mildly, ‘you have done well, and I admire you for it,—not as well as I could wish, but, I trust, still all will turn out well.’

‘Then what are all these hints about ruin and misfortune? I’m sure I was always led to think we were well off—splendidly off; and now it turns out——’

‘You were warned in time, Charles; it is too late now. Three weeks—this day three weeks. That is settled. Go and speak to Jenny about it.’

‘Stay, wait a moment, Charles. Could you spare me a few minutes?’


Charlotte passed out.

‘I wished,’ said Mr. Franklyn, ‘to talk to you about the sum I can afford to give you. (I know you hate business, but Charlotte says, very wisely, I should speak to you about this matter.) We must look at things seriously now.’

Young Franklyn was indeed looking as seriously as could be desired.

‘Charlotte says very wisely again, you will have to put your shoulder to the wheel, my dear boy; but we must all strain a point to help you.’

The youth said nothing, but kept his eyes on the floor.



‘You will have to pinch and save at first, until—until we get straight, if we ever *do* get straight. Of course we shall eventually. But I am afraid, my dear child, three hundred a year and your pay is as much as we can spare you.’

The youth’s face grew more blank. ‘Why, I spend that myself,’ he said; ‘more than that. Why, I owe three times that. No person, sir, could keep his wife on such a sum.’

‘It is very hard, I know,’ said Mr. Franklyn, mildly; ‘perhaps with hard scraping we might get up a little more.’

‘But where is all the money?’ said the youth excitedly; ‘I thought I was told there was to be plenty of money presently.’


‘So I hoped,’ said Mr. Franklyn, with a sigh; ‘in fact, Crowle had it all arranged, but——’

‘Why, there’s Smith,’ said the youth. ‘Look at Philip Smith. *His* father,—’

‘Ah, yes,’ said Mr. Franklyn, sadly, ‘I don’t know *how* they manage it. But dear Charlotte tells me *she* was an heiress.’

The youth took his hat and stick, and went out—wandered about moodily for some hours, slashing branches and bushes impatiently. It is wonderful what a world of destruction he did during that time.

Two days went over from that day. The third brought young Mr. Charles a letter from his army agent. Would he be inclined to enter into a treaty for an exchange? There was Lieutenant Cogdyse, for whom the moral temperature of his own corps had grown too close, and which he was willing to exchange for the more stifling physical air of India. There were pecuniary advantages, too, in the transaction on the side of the youth. It was very unexpected and very little looked for; so henceforth there was an end of going out to the tropics and dying there. This awkward alternative was cut off, which was a relief. Yet strange to say, he did not mention the proposal to any one, for that day at least, but kept the letter carefully in his pocket. The fact was, this Charles was no more than a boy—a mere boy. But half a dozen years ago he



was greedy for a toy, and within an hour was breaking it up.

Jenny Bell, we may be pretty sure, asked him concerning that interview in Mr. Franklyn's parlour. There should always be strict confidence between lovers. He told her eagerly; then seeing that he came out of it a little awkwardly, as one who was not too eager to hurry on the marriage, he stopped and grew embarrassed.

'They were in such a tremendous hurry, Jenny, for it—you know there is no need for our rushing into a thing of this sort. I must look about me. I must have time—it's very hard;' and he got red and confused.

'And your sister,' said Jenny; 'she was naturally anxious we should wait a little? So I thought.'

'On the contrary,' said he, 'she was most eager for it.'

'Ah,' said Jenny, 'so I thought—so I thought; naturally so.'

The youth did not see this little contradiction in his Jenny's reception of his news, for,

to say the truth, he had not a very logical mind.

‘And don’t you think, Charles, dear,’ said Jenny, in a very wheedling way, ‘it would be about prudent to follow our dear Charlotte’s advice, for your *own* sake, leaving *me* out of the question? I can see, dearest Charles, that in this house, just at this moment, you are—what shall I say?—uncomfortable—in a sort of doubtful way. Consider it now, just for your *own* sake.’

The youth coloured up. ‘What, are *you* at it too? What are you all persecuting me for in this way? I must say I didn’t expect it, after all the sacrifices I have——’

He stopped, and indeed would have been a brute to go on, for there came from the now outraged Jenny a sigh—*such* a sigh! She sank down on a chair and turned away her face.

The youth’s heart was touched. ‘Forgive me, Jenny,’ he said; ‘they worry me so. There—there now—I didn’t mean it.’

Jenny got cheerful in a moment, for she had wonderful control in her emotions, and she saw,

perhaps, that the duty of soothing was fatiguing her young lover. They made it up, but he went his way thoughtfully, as was his wont, out into the open air, which had latterly become his fancy.

CHAPTER XV.

‘BY LITTLE AND LITTLE.’

WHEN he was gone, our Jenny thought it over carefully for some time, and perhaps resolved not to let him be long absent out of her company for the future. She thought Charlotte was upstairs in her room.

Charles, meanwhile, posting along the high-road, presently hears the clatter of horses behind him, and turning round is overtaken by the wise sister Charlotte, her hair swinging and tossing with the motion, and her cheeks coloured with the healthful exercise. Her groom rode as good a horse, so she pulled up suddenly and bade Charles mount; and on that, they both turned back into the fields.

The wise sister was too wise for balls and

parties and the ordinary pasture-lands of female life, but she loved her horse. She would have hunted, only she feared to scandalize the neighbourhood. She now proposed a famous ride across country, which her brother accepted joyfully. Both horses were fresh, and went over hedges, and ditches, and smooth field, horsefully—(men do things *manfully*).

The pair grew quite excited by their scamper, and after an hour’s work, walked their horses home slowly, by the high-road.

‘This is grand stuff,’ the youth said, having now quite got back his spirits.

‘Delightful!’ the sister answered; ‘it is heaven on horseback. We must go out often together, Charlie, and make the most of our time. Poor Annie!’ she added, stroking the mane of her horse.

‘Why, poor Annie?’ said the youth.
‘What’s the matter with her?’

‘She is to leave us very soon. Poor Annie! You know papa is going to sell all the horses.’

‘Sell all the horses! No more riding?’

‘And the carriages. No more driving, too.’

We are going to save, Charlie,' she said, cheerfully.

The youth groaned. 'Surely this is penury, beggary, starvation!' he said. 'I never thought——'

'Oh, we shall do very well,' said she, with encouragement. 'Don't think of it, Charlie; we shall get on very well at some cheap watering-place.'

'Cheap watering-place! What *are* you talking about?' said he, impatiently.

'My dear Charles,' she said, 'you must know very little of what has been going forward. Surely papa explained to you——'

'Oh, I see—I see,' the youth said, with something like a groan.

'But we make the sacrifice cheerfully. We can do very well without horses, and if we can save the place——'

'Save the place! Oh, surely, Charlotte, you are not serious?'

'My dear boy, as for the horses or the house, they are nothing. But let me tell you one thing—you never, never can be too grate-

ful to dear papa for all that he has given up to gratify your wishes in this respect. In fact, I ought not to tell you, but he has sacrificed some of his darling plans for your sake ; so I think, my dear Charlie, you should try a little and show it to him in some way.’

‘But I never knew,’ said the youth, much confounded. ‘I should—I should have——’

‘Ah, that was poor papa’s delicacy. Now you must not pretend to know that I have told you. Did he ever speak to you of Lord Porkchester’s borough?’

‘To be sure! He always wanted it for me. He means me to be in Parliament some day.’

‘Ah, *some* day. I hope so, Charles. You know Lord Porkchester had always refused him. Well, just as you were arranging—this—your marriage—there came a letter from Lord Porkchester——.’

‘What! offering the borough?’

‘Yes.’

‘To me?’

‘To you!’

‘Oh, by Jove!’ said the youth, without a word more.

‘Father had done him some service, and he was grateful. I was in the secret. Lord Porkchester’s cousin told me of it over at Craven. Oh! I was feasting on the notion. Our having a Member in our family at last! It is the grandest of influences, when coupled with old blood. And as for dear father, you know how *his* heart runs upon that, and how he has toiled for it. Yet he gave it up, I assure you, without a murmur.’

‘But why wasn’t I told?’ said the youth, vehemently. ‘Why wasn’t——’

‘While you,’ said his sister, ‘were to have been saved from that hateful India. Eternal leave of absence for Parliamentary duty.’

‘But why,’ repeated the youth again, ‘why wasn’t I told? why wasn’t I——’

‘My dear Charles, it is no use talking of it now. I only mention it to show how much we owe to dear papa, who has borne up wonder-

fully. As for Parliament, horses, and that sort of thing,' she added, pointing to the old house, 'that is all over now. We must only try and make each other as happy as we can. Above all, be attentive to Jenny. Yet I am sure you will tell her all this, and that I am putting you against her. Well, I say candidly, I am sorry you got into it, Charlie. We should have liked you to have made a good match. But now that it is done, we must all help to make it as pleasant as we can. And very often, my dear Charlie, we are foolish in our wishes, and these grand alliances turn out very miserably. You and Jenny will do very well. But you must work, Charlie. Will you take the horses round?' She slipped down, and walked soberly in.

The rest of that evening the youth was very moody, and spoke very little. After dinner he lounged about recklessly, in and out.

'Come and take a walk in the hall,' he said to Jenny Bell.

She laid down her work meekly; and, with a smile ineffably sweet, arose to obey his com-

mand. The younger girls looked after them ;
then looked at each other, as who should say,
'They are gone for their accustomed meal of
billing and cooing.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME!

CHARLES walked up and down with her for some moments without speaking. She waited, and finding the duty cast upon her, as it now often was, said—

‘Well, Charlie, dear, what were you busy with all to-day? Were you laying out any more schemes for your new life—our new life?’

‘No—that is—not exactly,’ he said, a little gruffly.

‘Shall I tell you what I was thinking of?’ she said, looking up into his face, and leaning on his arm. ‘Oh! I have laid out such plans. First——’

‘Jenny,’ said the youth, suddenly, and stop-

ping short, 'I was thinking that—that all this is very absurd.'

'Charles !'

'I mean this hurry—this violent hurry. What's the necessity? Surely there's lots of time: we are both young. And now, would you mind,' he hesitated and got red—'would you mind putting it off a year or two, or say two years or so, until we had time to—to look about us?'

Jenny did not answer, but fixed her round eyes on him with a deep searching look. She loosened her arm from his. The youth got redder, and dropped his eyes guiltily. She still did not answer: he grew dreadfully uncomfortable.

'I see—I see!' she said at last: 'I was suspecting this.'

'Oh, no, no!' he said, timidly; 'it was not that.'

'Not what?' she said, scornfully, and in a voice so firm and strong it quite startled him. 'See how you betray yourself. Come,' she added, more gently, 'it is better to be candid,

and speak plainly. Tell me, is this some pretext for breaking the fall—for going back ? Come, Charlie ; don't be afraid ; speak out. Surely you would have confidence in *me*—your Jenny ?' and she put on a coaxing air. 'Come, let us have confidence in one another.'

'Oh, Jenny !' said the youth, with effusion, 'what will you think of me—what will you say of me ? You are too good, too kind, and generous ; and I am a poor creature that don't know my own mind. Just think ; you *know* I am no more than a boy. I'm not accountable—indeed I'm not.'

'Ah !' said Jenny, again flashing out. 'So now the truth is out. This is what you have been hatching and plotting, you and your sister, these days back. Eh ?'

The youth trembled. 'No, no ; indeed, no. It was not *my* fault.'

'*Your* fault ! No, indeed, you are not accountable. My poor Charlie, they have been tampering with you. *Your* poor, weak nature could not think of such a thing. But it can't be, my dear child. Things have gone a little

too far. You must try and reconcile yourself to the notion, however distasteful.' And she nodded and smiled on him as sweetly as before, and took his arm.

The youth had the sort of courage weak people sometimes have, when they find the worst is over. He freed himself gradually, and began with an aggrieved tone, almost whimpering in its key.

'It is very hard,' he said; 'very hard. Why should this be forced on me? I'm very young—too young—quite a boy, in fact. You must let me off for a time; indeed you must.'

The gradually deepening look of scorn with which she was regarding him was indescribable. 'Come,' she said, 'this is too serious a thing, Master Charles. I can't afford to release you. No. When you think it over, you will see it in the proper light. Come, be sensible for once. Go to bed now, and speak to me again in the morning.'

The youth was getting more courageous every moment. 'I can't indeed,' he said. 'It was a foolish thing from the beginning; and,

as they all say, there was an unfair advantage taken of my youth.'

'WHAT!' said Jenny, starting back, and raising up her hand.

The youth cowered.

'You *know* I was a boy, and it *was* a *shame*—and they say so. And——'

'Go on,' said Jenny, still looking at him with such contempt.

He did go on. 'And I needn't go to India now; for I can make an exchange. I have the papers upstairs.'

'Oh!' said Jenny.

'It is very hard to expect that I should ruin my family, all for a stranger. And it would ruin them, and you know it would. Why should I reduce them to beggary, and make them sell off the hunters, and let the place?'

The aggrieved manner in which the youth made this declaration was really indescribable. He was getting bolder every moment, as he thought he saw signs of weakness in Jenny.

Jenny listened with curiosity; nay, gave a sort of little start. 'They have been frighten-

ing you, poor boy—things are not quite so bad—I know it. Ah!’ she went on, mournfully, ‘what a mournful lot mine is! And yet I have done nothing to her. I would not be anybody’s enemy,—no, indeed!’

‘And who says you have an enemy?’ said the youth, sulkily. ‘Do you mean Charlotte?’ He was thinking how exactly had come out what Charlotte had told him.

‘Ah! *you* don’t understand me,’ said Jenny, measuring him, coldly. ‘You are thinking of the childish stories of ruin they have been telling you.’

‘I tell you, it is true,’ said he. ‘I know it. Papa showed it to me in black and white—I know he tells the truth. You don’t think he tells lies, do you? He says we must work, and what not, and can only spare me three hundred a year. Why, it is beggary—starvation. Then I had a letter this morning. I thought they would send me to India;—I couldn’t stand that. I needn’t go now. I shall go to-morrow to London, and settle all about the exchange.’ He stopped then, and

looked at her. 'I say, Jenny, don't be angry with me. I can't help it—I can't, indeed. I know it looks shabby; but—but—I—I should be *wretched* if it went on. *There!* I know I'll never like any one so well.' He was almost going to whimper again.

'Poor child,' said Jenny; 'poor, weak, feeble child! None of this is your doing. You've been tampered with. Never mind. Don't be frightened. You shall have your wish. You shall not be dragged to the altar. There.'

'O Jenny, Jenny,' murmured the youth, 'you are too—too good.'

'There,' said Jenny, 'go now. You must do one thing, however. Say nothing, for to-night, of this business—take care you do not. I have a reason for it.'

She quite spoke to him as a child, and with an air of authority quite new. He answered her abjectly, that he would not.

'Further, you must forget that we have had this conversation, mind. Never speak of it to anyone.'

He answered in the same abject way, that he would take all care.

‘Good night, then,’ she said. ‘You shall be free. I have seen the change coming, and, you see, was prepared. After all, it would not have done. I have other views. Go to bed now, and sleep well.’

He slunk away, upstairs, inexpressibly relieved. He was a mean, weak creature, indeed, as she said ; but only consider, he was very young.

Miss Bell went slowly back to the drawing-room, sat down again, and took up her work. Charles was gone to his room. Headache.

Then she talked with them pleasantly, and in quite an unconcerned way, even with Charlotte. To her she was specially affectionate ; and the sensible girl reciprocated. Then, when it came to bed-time, she kissed them all round with such affection, and with such a soft air of sweetness and suffering resignation, that they began to think with self-reproach they had not been near cordial enough to her, and would be better for the future.

She then took her candle and went to her room—her *little* room—fetched out her small travelling blotting-book, and began to write. Such a simple noble letter, without pomp or flourish of self-sacrifice. Indeed, it almost reached to the heroic. She calmly did the duty that she proposed to do, without loss of self-respect. She told him that she had seen from the beginning that the thing was unsuitable; that he would, at least, do her justice to acknowledge that she had been reluctant throughout; that it was only at their pressing instances she had consented. Fortunately, it was not too late. It was nobody's fault but hers. Nothing could have been kinder or more tender than their behaviour. Mr. Franklyn's she would never, *never* forget. But again she must repeat, no one but herself was to blame; so that now, finally, she had determined that this business should come to an end. And this purpose of hers was irrevocable; nothing should change her.

She was not too proud, however, she said, to ask their aid in another direction. Possi-

bly, Mr. Franklyn might not think it too much to help her on a little in her struggles through the world: such aid she would thankfully accept. She was not proud, thank Heaven, and could be grateful.

This she directed to Mr. Franklyn. She then tripped down stairs with the note in her hand—met a stray servant—the last straggler of the tribe then up; put it into his or her hands, with a gentle request that if they were going down that way, they would be so kind as to leave it at Mr. Franklyn's study. After that she returned to her room, went to her little hoard, and took out a little Letts' diary.

She was always a remarkably business-like little woman, and used to say, in her quiet way, that nothing she would have so liked as to have been a merchant's wife, and kept the accounts and totted the ledgers. Merchants' wives do not ordinarily keep the accounts and tot the ledgers; but we are not to be too strict with her little phraseology. Every day, however, she posted *her* little ledger, and kept the diary with great strictness. She had reasons

for this exactness. She turned to the present day of the month, and began to fill in the space allotted in a fine composed little hand. She seemed to get a great deal into a line.

Any one looking at her as she wrote, would have seen the round face grow sharp of a sudden—would have seen the full-coloured cheeks turn pale, and the lips be compressed sharply.

For she was just then making a particular entry, which she did in a larger hand, giving herself more room, taking care, also, to underline it heavily. This was the name she wrote so slowly and carefully:—

‘Mem.

‘H CHARLOTTE FRANKLYN.’

And with great care she finished off a cross before the name. She thickened the strokes with love, as though she were doing a little bit of art.

Having finished this little duty, she went to bed, and it is believed slept tranquilly.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

JENNY BELL IN SERVICE.

A SPAN of say ten months is supposed to have passed by since that *dénouement* down at the Franklyns', when our poor Jenny, so barbarously treated by her weak lover, gave up her brilliant alliance, and so calmly made that little entry in her diary. The firmness of that poor lowly outcast was the admiration, not to say of the whole house, but of the whole county; and she departed attended with a veneration that properly waits only on a saint. Her heroism was even more fruitful, for on the legend coming to Mr. Archdeacon's ears, he at once kindly thought of some London friends whom

such a paragon would exactly suit, and procured Miss Bell admission to a desirable family circle. Her position was left in a happy duskiness, shaded off from the deep hue of companionship into the subdued tone of tuition, from thence into the more unmistakeable domain of defined friendship. This was for the world outside. But she, poor child, always called a spade a spade, and said in a low, sweet voice, but very plainly, that she was 'going to be a governess.'

And as governess she was already installed at the mansion of 'Frederick Maxwell, Esquire, Q.C., Recorder of Pennington, Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, and Chesterfield Street, Mayfair.' Thus, at least, was he blazoned in the Books of Common Prayer which the bishops and priests of the sacred college of heraldry had put together for the use of the fashionable pious. And at Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, in charge of three girls, of various ages, was our Jenny now residing, and making herself very useful; for 'the lady' (to use a fine word of fashionable Scripture)—

‘the lady’ of Frederick Maxwell, Esquire, Q.C., the eminent working barrister, was then lying grievously sick, and all the authorized incidents of a legitimate sick-bed were then enacting up-stairs. Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., might have been labouring down in a coal-mine, or digging at so many shillings a week. But here something must be said for Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., the eminent counsel.

His father was Sir Charles Maxwell, of Burbage Hall, in a ripe old county, and the son would by and by be Sir Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., or perhaps find himself some morning distributing rings and mottoes, and waken up as a serjeant, newly born into brotherhood with the judges. How would his style and titles then ring out? Serjeant Sir Frederick Maxwell, Q.C.? A tall, thin, and bent man, in the incidence of a human fishing-rod, with black hair, just silvering, black whiskers, silvering also, and a cold business face, sadly worn. He was in first-class Parliamentary business; the vapours of hot committees were the air he breathed and loved, and the dull appreciations

of county members were his jurymen. His fees were Parliamentary, too, which Mrs. Maxwell took charge of, and flung about gallantly. He was worked, in short, not by any means like a horse, which is a very unsuitable comparison, but like a human beast of burden or intellectual hack, which is the true standard. Did the brutes compare notes wearily as to their sufferings, the favourite object of comparison with them, would be the Parliamentary lawyer, whom one of their brethren draws down every day to Westminster in his brougham.

So Mr. Maxwell could scarcely be said to have eaten or drank (making merry was ludicrous), or, indeed, lived at all; but he was always before the Committee. Life for him was a Bill, and a Bill only! It was not made up, as according to the vulgar notions, of sun and bright skies and light air, and the softer social duties, or of gladness or griefs. His world was a Committee-room — ‘standing orders’ his gospel, and when he had got his Bill through, he was saving his soul. When Mrs. Maxwell, therefore, grew sick, and as it

seemed, likely for a permanence, the three little girls were helpless. If he would, the Parliamentary gladiator *could* do nothing. It was too late to draw back, and he was bound to the Committee-Satan, body and soul.

Helen, Grace, and Mary—twelve, ten, and nine years old—were the three little girls whom Jenny was looking after in Chesterfield Street. It was wonderful how *much* she looked after—the sick woman, house, and girls, and apparently never absent from either; looked after everybody but Mr. Maxwell, who needed it more than any one in the world. He barely saw her, and when he saw her, barely knew her. She was not on a Parliamentary Committee. At breakfast a hand, Jenny's round, plump hand, set his cup of tea before him. For him, however, it was only a hand—possibly a servant's—for he had Sixth House of Lords Cases tilted up before him on the toast-rack, and was taking in Lord Wensleydale and Mr. Justice Willes with his dry crust. The little girls sat round demurely and devoutly, and barely whispered

while Lord Wensleydale was crackling between his teeth. So was it during dinner: House of Lords cases were not, indeed, set on *à la Russe*, but Lord Wensleydale was still fermenting in his head. He hurried through the meal, and got back again to the Committee-room, where his heart had been all the time. With one chief of the family sick, and the other virtually absent, what an invaluable person must our Jenny have been about a house! A perfect treasure!

CHAPTER II.

A COUNTRY VISITOR.

SHE had not been there a fortnight, when word was brought one day into the school-room that a gentleman was in the school-room for Miss Bell.

Jenny lifted her eyes with wonder. What gentleman? There could be no gentleman; she knew of none. It was a mistake, Jenny firmly repeated.

The menial said it was a clergyman-like sort of a person.

Jenny shook her head sorrowfully; why, it would be difficult to analyse. Yet it somehow appealed to Mr. Baker's heart, as who should say — 'How were gentlemen or clergy-

men to come inquiring for me?' Mr. Baker held a very favourable opinion of the new governess, as one who knew her place, and spoke of her in the crypts below with a tempered approbation, subject, of course, to be corrected by future conduct; and he went back for further information. He returned with the clerical gentleman's card, 'The Rev. Charlton Wells.'

'Seeing gentlemen' is the forbidden fruit for the governess order—a suspicious transaction under all circumstances; but the cloth—the clerical neckcloth—took it out of the rule. So Miss Jenny went down, fluttered and hurriedly.

The Reverend Charlton met her with a boyish agitation; torrents of blood streamed to his cheeks; his fingers trembled; his speech was incoherent. Not so our Jenny, who was obliged to put on a demeanour quite foreign to her own native temper. She almost froze him up. But it was clear that any wild behaviour from this uncontrolled curate might be looked for; and such visits for a young

thing entering on life were highly compromising.

‘I did not expect to see you here, Mr. Wells,’ she said, coldly. ‘Have you any message or business?’

The curate’s utterance staggered fearfully.

‘I came,’ he said, confused, ‘to—to—see you!’

‘Oh,’ said Jenny, ‘you came up from the country expressly, I suppose.’

‘Expressly,’ said the curate, eagerly; ‘for no other purpose in the world.’

‘I see,’ she said. ‘A costly journey.’

‘Were it ten times as much,’—he went on.

‘Stop,’ said she; ‘stop there. I am afraid I see the whole depth of this infatuation of yours. I thought we had talked over this folly, and that you had seen it in a proper light. No! no!’ said Jenny, sadly shaking her head. ‘And the Franklyns, I suppose, told you where I was.’

‘No, indeed, I found it out myself. They refused. But I came up here ten days ago, and have hunted all London, I may say, day

and night; and at last, only this morning, did I succeed. And now, Miss Bell—*dear* Miss Bell—I *must* speak again. *Now* you are free. *Then*——’

‘Free!’ said Jenny, with a dramatic tone and significance worthy of the stage; ‘free!’

The curate understood her, and was delighted. He rose himself at once into melodrama.

‘It is to rescue you that I have come,’ he said; ‘to cast off those fetters. Too well I know what must be the degrading servitude of a—a——’

‘Finish,’ said Jenny, smiling; ‘I do not blush for my calling.’

‘Come with me,’ he continued, rapturously; ‘those comforting words you spoke in the garden have never been forgotten. Come with me, Jenny, my own Jenny; there are bright hopes before us—a glorious future; we will link our fortunes together, and together walk through life.’

Jenny was listening to this burst as calmly and as collectedly as she did to one of his

Sunday sermons. But something at the close troubled her. All along she had heard the world—the world of the country parish—say that something was to be done for that excellent young man, Wells; and there was a belief that hands would be stretched out of a cloud to furnish him with a misty bit of preferment—also, by and by. From his confident style of speech, perhaps, the blessing had already come; and our Jenny wished to have the ground quite clear before she spoke.

‘But,’ said she, gently, ‘you talk of facing the world. Do you know what facing the world is?’

‘Fighting the world—doing battle with the world—struggling valiantly to the front, and arresting the prize from the hands even of the unwilling!’ said the curate, with flashing eyes.

This seemed sufficiently plain, yet Jenny would hear a little more—would be certain—before she spoke. She shook her head sorrowfully.

‘But until the prize is won,’ she said, ‘we must support the vulgar function of living.’

‘Enough for me,’ said the rhapsodical curate, ‘enough for me the presence of *her* whom I love; *she* would be the loadstar—perish wealth, perish——’

Many other matters were to perish also, which Jenny did not take heed of. It was sufficient. There was no rectory as yet. He was only anxious to secure his loadstar first; hereafter Providence might do the rest. Jenny might naturally be aggrieved by the effrontery of such proposals; but from her manner no one could fetch an idea of what was passing in her mind. She was no doubt too noble to wound so simple and trusting a heart.

‘These are all dreams,’ she said, rising, ‘dreams of the wildest. Still, wishers like you and me may, at least, have the luxury of dreaming. But for any form of life to be based on these dreams’—she shook her head sadly—‘it is not to be thought of. Not as yet, at least,’ she added, with a glance at his blank, despairing face; ‘not for years, at least, till the highway opens, and the landscape clears.’

This was not Jenny's habitual tone of speech; but she adapted it to the occasion.

'But,' said the curate, wistfully, 'we can work together—cast our lot together.' (It was quite certain about the rectory now.) 'This strong arm——'

Jenny's brow contracted; this strain was growing tiresome. She rose.

'I am afraid,' she said, 'I must go; I am a genteel slave, and must go back to the galleys.'

Suddenly an idea seemed to strike her; a curious smile passed over her face—a flash of joy.

'You are going down again to the country?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said, despairingly, 'I suppose so. What does it matter *where* I go?'

'Because,' she said, 'if it would not be too much; and, after all, it *is* asking a great deal——'

The Rev. Charlton Wells grew eager again.

'Anything, anything,' he said, 'only tell me.'

‘Well,’ she said, ‘you will be in the country; you will be with those dear Franklyns, my best friends, my protectors; you will see them often, every day; would it be too much trouble—would it be asking too much—to let me hear from you now and then about them?’

Again the curate’s spirits leaped up. This was a blind, a poor pretence, for hiding a deeper interest in *him*. He saw it all. He answered, ecstatically, that he would write—write—write always, every day, and for ever.

‘*They* write, of course,’ continued Jenny, ruminating—‘they are very kind; but I should love to hear of them from others—to hear about them—the minutest, the most trivial details will be welcome.’

The curate, overflowing with joy, would fill reams of paper.

‘And that dear, sensible girl, Charlotte,’—and, as she mentioned the name, one of those curious twitches, before spoken of, contorted her face for the space of a flash, and which the Reverend Charlton Wells took for pain—‘that

dear Charlotte, all about *her*, if you please ; all that you hear : her little ways, and what she says. Oh, she was so kind to me in my trial ! you can have no idea how kind she was. She gave me this little bottle. It's a foolish wish ; but you, *your* delicate nature will, I know, understand me.'

She held out her hand. The curate, consoled, proud, and overflowing, took it with *effusion*. He had got a commission. Skilful women, wearied with persevering lovers, who will not retreat without offence and sore wounds, often thus artfully pacify them. Then Jenny, suddenly discovering that she had been too long away, fled—rather floated—away like a vision. The curate's heart was sore and aching ; and yet she had laid some balsam on it. That commission ! How woman-like, how gentle—how absurd, perhaps, if weighed critically ; yet, how like her.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVESICK CURATE.

THE noble creature went back to her obscurity again, to the humdrum drudgery of child cultivation; she had had a little glimpse of the world outside, which was not to be for her; she had stood a moment at Eden's gate—a sort of governess Peri disconsolate; and had even secured for herself, by this willing instrument, a sort of thread, ever so fine, to join her to those sweet old associations. Who could blame her for looking back through the bars of her prison-gate?

The curate went down exulting. He came home to his first floor over the shop in his mean country town, and it did not seem to him quite so blank, or so bare. The flavour of

provisions did not ascend to him quite so rank or strong.

For the first night or two he had company over his little cottage grate—for it did not rise to much higher dignity. He lay back in his chair, and wasted many precious hours idly dreaming, and entertaining this profitable society. He constructed all manner of theatrical pictures, which seemed to him very sweet and soft—with figures in the centre; and one figure (arrayed in silken vestings and general clergymanical finery), doing much chivalry. He put this *poupée* into all manner of splendid situations, made its face impressive, its speech slow and grand, while its interior heart was being racked and wrung with agonies of love, jealousy, rage, and despair. He made it retire in noble situations, with dignity and indifference, filling those who were left behind with wonder, curiosity, disappointment, and unspeakable admiration. Miss Jenny Bell was always left behind under these emotions.

In these proceedings in lunacy, were several useful nights consumed. There was a sermon

for the approaching Sunday lying on his desk, the first page of which had been 'got in,' but which he did not suffer to interfere with his amatory meditations. He had now a curious repugnance to this setting together dry religious bones into improving shapes; and it seemed the most dreary, dismal task, that man could conceive. Here, however, it was now come to Saturday morning, and the thing must be scrambled over somehow.

He used to delight in his sermon-making. He used to touch and polish, and refine, and repair, and read choice passages to the young ladies, in anticipation. He was proud of the work; and the young ladies used to talk over at dinner, little neat odd bits, small scraps of originality which struck them. His soul was then all in the parish. He was enthusiastic. Now, a spiritual dryness was come upon him.

He leant a little to the new theology, and was fond—merely in an amateur way—of turning over in his fingers, the prettier portions; just as he would admire a little china teacup, or a bit of filigree. He and the young ladies

had ever so much æsthetic talk about the non-essentials. He had all the Oxford Fathers, bound in green, looking down from the shelves; and was in the habit of saying, there was really much originality in some of Doctor Newman's writings. He wore, too, a lovely silk waistcoat, which seemed like a little black silk *san benito*, covering his chest altogether, with a hole to allow easy exit for his neck.

The Sunday's sermon was not much. It was unavoidable that there should be marks of haste, which might be pardoned, as the missionary work was heavy; but it was short—offensively short. Long sermons may be soporific; but there is a latent respect implied in their length. Brevity brings with it suspicion of a contempt or wish to be rid of the duty speedily, as being done per contract. It was said even there was loose, careless doctrine,—but these were the sectaries of Calvin.

This unsteadiness, these irregular flittings to London, had been noticed, and were spoken of. Very grateful were such topics to the parish, long hungering and athirst for some really good

substantial nutriment in that direction. Then he went over to the Franklyns to dine very eagerly. He was longing to begin his duties in that other more profane parish to which he had recently been appointed.

The Franklyns were all there. Mr. Franklyn was something more cheerful, but all the rest of the family were in very high spirits. There was sly and secret chatter, and quiet innuendoes, which mystified the Reverend Charlton Wells. But it was clear there was some good news afloat. Amiable family, always so kind to him, so thoughtful—he was glad of it, for their sakes; and he was already composing the first sentence of his Jenny's letter—embodying his report.

Mr. Archdeacon was there again. He was measuring 'that young man, Wells,' with a cold and pearly eye. He took him in, as it were, surreptitiously across the bridge of his (Mr. Archdeacon's) own nose. Wells was privately considered slack in reference to the Dissenters. He had not been beating the non-conformist thickets with Church horns and

Church hounds. He was not a true religious sportsman. Mr. Archdeacon liked none but able-bodied workmen under him. He shook his head over 'that young man, Wells.'

The young man, Wells, did not heed him; he was bold and careless, and did not, at any time, reverence ecclesiastical authority too much. It had been found out, with delight, that he, latest of all, had seen their dear Jenny, their noble Jenny—was fresh from her presence, and could give the newest details. He glowed up as though his cheeks had been stirred fiercely like a fire, but was not detected, as he was hardly full in the light. He then entered upon a minute narrative—delicious task—was stopped, made to stand and deliver, with question from this side and that pointed at him, and told the whole delightful story. No one more interested than the sensible girl. It was a charming evening.

Mr. Archdeacon caught a word or two afar off, in reference to London. He heard his clerical chattel dwelling enthusiastically on each incident of the expedition. He dropped his

account of the last successful Dissenting *battue*, and, contracting his archidiaconal brows, looked warily over across his own nose, as it might be across a hedge. On the first opening he raised his piece and fired—

‘So, it appears you were in London. Hey, Mr. Wells?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the other, ‘for a short time. Well, as I was saying, Miss Franklyn, I found out the house—was shown into a parlour. I really had no idea at first that she would see me’—

‘You enjoyed yourself apparently,’ Mr. Arch-deacon struck in again; ‘I suppose you found time to attend that grand meeting of the Missionary Feeder Society, Lord Buryshaft in the chair?—I suppose one of the most magnificent organizations, as yet untainted by Dissent, the world has seen.’

Mr. Wells was waiting in his London parlour, and did not relish being checked on the verge of his interview, so he answered, a little stiffly: ‘No, sir; I knew nothing of that valuable Society. I went up to London

with quite other views—for a particular purpose, in fact——’

‘Then I must take leave to tell you, sir, that you neglected a valuable opportunity—one that may never return. It is impossible to estimate the seriousness of such an auxiliary engine as that. And I may remark that in these days, when Indifferentism is making such strides, and when there is a curious carelessness abroad as to the duties of the spiritual pastor, the wolf—the wolf, sir—is abroad.’

The Archdeacon’s eye at this moment falling on the doctor of the village, with a sort of abstracted fierceness, that professional person said, timorously—

‘The wolf, sir?’

‘The wolf of Dissent, sir,’ said Mr. Archdeacon, savagely, and now for the first time seeing him—‘of Dissent—howling Dissent. It is prowling nightly about our farms and homesteads. And no wonder, sir, when the shepherds sleep. Sir, the Church of England, by its spirit and canons, is universally a mission-

ary church. I have spoken to the Bishop about it. The Bishop sees it as I do. He joins with me in thinking that Dissent is howling. You shall hear an allusion to it in his next charge. Sir, you did wrong to pass by so glorious an opportunity. You did wrong, sir !

Mr. Wells' cheeks were glowing at this public attack. It was, besides, undeserved ; for he had done a good deal of fowling in the dissenting direction. He was rather exulting on the strength and enthusiasm of his Jenny Bell attachment, and ecclesiastical concerns seemed very small and indifferent to him now.

‘There must be some mistake, sir,’ he said. ‘This reprimand can scarcely be intended for me. Arising, too, out of a little harmless journey to London ! I think Mr. Archdeacon can scarcely be serious.’

‘Serious, sir, when the hydra of Dissent——’

‘Can scarcely be meant to entail eternal residence. *That* would turn us into white slaves in orders. As for that Missionary Feeder Society, I look on it as——’

But the sensible girl, seeing into what fatal perverseness—ruin to his own prospects—this curate, barely fledged in his Church, was hurrying, struck in—

‘You are not going to deliver the Bishop’s charge to us now, Mr. Archdeacon,’ she said, smiling. ‘Only consider; what is the proverb about meat for strong babes? We are all strong babes here.’

‘*Strong* meat for babes, Miss Franklyn,’ said Mr. Archdeacon, much pleased to be allowed the correction. ‘That is the shape of the quotation. But Church discipline is always seasonable. I recollect so well the late Bishop Stinger remarking to me,’ &c.

The remark of the late Bishop Stinger was of that valuable sort which always leaves a sort of surprise on the hearer’s mind, why it should have been rescued from obscurity, and then ventilated by the agency of frequent quotation. More useful was it on this occasion, for it turned away the wrath of an ecclesiastical Habakkuk, and prevented an unseemly dispute. But the clerical captain marked the

careless tone of his private, and registered a mental memorandum that for the future he would keep him specially in view, and if possible have him conveniently on the hip. Anything like insubordination in the ranks would not do for him, in an enemy's—that is, in a dissenting country.

The curate then resumed his London adventures, for a select circle, and painted in his Jenny Bell with much warmth and force. The girls listened with devotion. Miss Franklyn, the sensible, showed the deepest interest—and kind and delicate interest. No wonder; perhaps she felt compunction for the stern part which duty had forced her to take up.

The flushed face of the Rev. Charlton Wells was turned towards her with a gentle sympathy. He was grateful, and already composing his bulletin—delightful duty, which would turn to Paradise the low chamber over the village huckstering shop—determined to give her a sweet and pleasant place in his first despatch.

Through that domestic banquet he was diligently taking notes all the while. Various

allusions, more or less intelligible and unintelligible, were shifted past his ears,—shafts from the family jokery, which were winged diagonally across the table, back and forward, from side to side. These were in that sort of spoken cypher, the key of which is with the members of the family circle, and the use of which in presence of strangers has even a sort of perverse fascination. This was clearly pointed at the sensible girl, and took the shape of gentle banter in reference to some knight or chevalier, with whom there were indistinct relations, as to what Brantôme would style *de par amours*.

According to the mild and peaceable procedure of the present century, our forefathers delighted in this agreeable shape of baiting, and called it, in their old-fashioned dialect, ‘rallying.’ Rallied, then, palpably was Miss Franklyn, as it seemed to Mr. Wells, who, wrapped up in his own special *de par amours*, as in a cloak, would otherwise have been indifferent, but being now accredited reporter, opened his ears. Some one after dinner—a confiding

junior girl of the family—unboundedly communicative, and a chartered ‘conduit pipe’ for all manner of tattle, told him further particulars with delight. The fact was, ‘Young Craven’ rather admired Charlotte—had testified this approbation rather publicly. Young Craven was lovely in the eyes of man, one of the Elderborn Heroes, a Sultan under an entail; in short, ‘desirable,’ which is the most splendid encomium, and unites all the gifts. At various houses, he and the sensible girl had met, and mutually admired. He was brave, generous, noble, good, chivalrous, spotless, and deserved the fair, as none but the brave—that is to say, the Elder Brave of the family, who alone *are* brave, and deserve such fair as are to be prizes in the arena. This Mary or Jane, junior, so indiscreetly free of heart and speech, and rather flattered at being selected as the channel of information, told him many more particulars, what hopes they had, how ‘nice’ he was, what difficulties were in the way, which were few, and what encouragement, which was much; and ‘what fun’ the whole thing was

generally. But the grander 'fun' of all was in the fact that 'Young Craven' was coming there on a visit very shortly, and would stay a long time; when the amount of extra 'fun' that might be looked for was almost incredible.

At the end of the night, Mr. Archdeacon went his way in a sort of archidiaconal gig—a simple and apostolic vehicle, whose horse had never yet crunched a morsel of Dissenter-grown oats. He shook hands dryly with 'that young man,' whose clerical temperament was of so low a tone, and wrote his pencilled mental mem. over again in heavy ink. The young man went *his* way with a sort of defiance, got home to his huckster's first floor, lit his lamp, and went eagerly to work.

Before he went to bed, he had written abundant particulars. She would like to hear of Mr. Franklyn, head of her old home, so he sketched him with detail. More natural, still, she would love to hear of the dear female friend, nearest to herself in age,—of the sensible girl, in short; so he dwelt on her portrait,

with lavish finish. All she had said and done; all she had looked; and then, coming to details, enlarged fully on that sort of child's gossip, knowing how grateful it would be to his Jenny. 'I have lost not a moment, dear Miss Bell,' he wrote, 'in letting you know this happy rumour. I have no very great faith in their nuptial castle-building; but I am sure you will be glad to learn even any fanciful speculations about our common friend. She is looking well—better than ever; intellectual, and—as some think—handsome. But personally, I want a sixth sense to admire her. She is not *my* style. I could, if it would not take up too much space, describe what is my style. I confess I am not for that utter spirituality of figure.' (Miss Franklyn was slightly made; our Jenny was round and sinuous.) 'As we are doomed to earth, I am not for approaching the ethereal *too* prematurely.' An elegant conceit here suggested itself which he longed to set down; something about taking the trouble of going to the pier-glass, and *that* would save all description of *his* ideal. But,

some way, it seemed to him to have a rustic flavour; for the rest, it was a delicate bit of imagery—almost Elizabethan—but which he saw required desperate courage to carry through. With a sigh, then, he forbore the pier-glass and closed his letter. That delightful labour done, he slept very sweetly that night—the sleep of the just curate.

Mr. Franklyn was still pursuing his melancholy duties. He went down sadly into that hold of his, with a mournful regularity, striving, it would seem, to bail out his incumbrance with a sort of Danaid's pitcher. He was neither the better nor the worse for his labours. At most he only established a sort of desperate equilibrium, apparently only getting rid of what fresh water entered, and not letting it gain.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITOR LOOKED FOR.

THE young man of business came very often, and was of great service disentangling accounts, raising, or more properly trying to raise, loans; for money was terribly scarce, he said; and the market was labouring under an affection known as tightness. Yet, some way, it was loose enough for the rest of the world. For that unhappy gentleman it was permanently constricted. Charges seemed actually to accumulate. Interest on moneys had to be met at periodic times, which came so close that the whole year seemed as one periodic season of interest paying. Nay, there was one annual payment—interest from railway mortgages—which merely glided through Mr. Franklyn's

hands, he being trustee, and which, unaccountably, seemed to give him trouble and delay, and which at times he could not forward without receipt of pressing letters. It reached scarcely to five hundred pounds half-yearly, being interest on a sum of sixteen thousand pounds in the railway. And yet this mere clerical office caused him much trouble and even agony as the day drew near. Kindly did his invaluable friend beg him not to perplex his head, with the thought; *he* would arrange it all;—leave it to him. At most, signing a formal paper would be all that would be required. He, Crowle, was well used to business; from which friendly and well-meant proposition, Mr. Franklyn literally shrunk away nervously. No, he must do all that himself—by himself. Still he fought on; staved off liabilities, one by one. It is wonderful how the evil day is so successfully fought off, and for so long.

Mr. Crowle meantime continued to come, and was really very agreeable in the house. He kept a good deal with the ladies; and young as he was with Mr. Franklyn in busi-

ness, became specially younger with the other sex at moments of relaxation. It was wonderful that he should carry the whole stock and share lists, state of markets, even the Honolulu Fours, in his head, and he so young. He used to come twice a week, but now came three times. He played at small plays in the evening, and even the sensible girl, who professed never to relish him, owned that he was not nearly so bad, after all; and consider this—he was so young, said the sensible girl.

Later on he began to drop in for two days running; later on still even oftener. He was very welcome. A place at the hospitable board was always kept ready for him. At a country mansion, a cover more or less is imperceptible. The dinner-table expands or contracts naturally, like caoutchouc; and the company of all that he most affected was that of Miss Franklyn the elder, the sensible girl.

Curious to say, she seemed to take much interest in the conversation of Mr. Crowle, the young man of business. She had a very practical mind, that Miss Franklyn, and delighted

much in the arcana and general mechanism of any special calling. And Mr. Crowle had an easy knack of popularizing stocks, their rise and fall; shares, bulls, bears, purchases for account, and other secret mysteries of the Exchange, in a fashion that was really entertaining. And on this subject she used to get him to enlarge very copiously.

This little train or chain of events continued to spread itself out continuously for a long time. Mr. Crowle came just as often, and almost oftener. One day he was in the garden pulling flowers carelessly, and in a pastoral fashion, quite delightful for one of his nature, when one of the younger girls came bounding and scampering along the walks to meet him. She was a child of good humour and spirits; and when five or six years younger, had filled the awful function of *enfant terrible*.

‘Ah, Mr. Crowle,’ she said, ‘tell me a secret; who are the flowers for? Come, now, you are getting quite a beau, Mr. Crowle; every one is remarking it.’

Mr. Crowle was anything but a man of business in his dress, and almost verged upon dandyism. This was his weakness—to be considered, in an innocent way, of course, a man of gallantry. He was enormously pleased.

‘Whom do you suppose they are for?’ he said, smiling. ‘For the old lady in Thread-needle Street?’

‘Nonsense,’ the young girl said, gaily; ‘for some one a good many hundred miles nearer. Confess now; we know all about it.’

Mr. Crowle might, indeed, have been pulling them for the old dame just alluded to; and if he had been pressed for the truth, would have to own that they were for his private dressing-table, it being part of his dandyism to love flowers, as a shape of decoration. He was curious about these hints, and suffering his mouth to distend into a smile—

‘Ah! you are too wise, too wide awake! You are growing up now, Miss Adela, and we must look out if we want to keep our secrets.’

Delighted at this compliment, she came up to him confidently.

‘Such fun as it was,’ she said. ‘Last night, you know, we plagued Charlotte’s life out about you, Mr. Crowle.’

‘About me,’ said he, and then shook his head softly; ‘I! No, no; always funning.’

‘But, oh yes, yes!’ said she. ‘And do you know what I said? Guess now.’

‘Something wicked?’

‘Yes; I said she had now got a beau in the Three per Cents. Ha, ha! Wasn’t it good?’

Mr. Crowle said it was very good, and at the same time very wicked. He was, at heart, rather confounded by this disclosure. Still, with this little bit of nature before him, he might try all manner of experiments.

‘How full of fun you always are, Miss Adela,’ he said! ‘I envy you your spirits. It is too much honour for me, poor Louis Crowle, to be named in the same breath; a knight, as you say so cleverly, of the Three per Cents.’

‘And Beau in the Stocks, ha, ha, ha!’ and

the girl went off boisterously into peals of laughter.

He relished it just as much, and went on sweetly—

‘Exactly ; and would a grand lady so wise, so good, so noble, so sensible, as she is—and I really, Miss Adela, have often wondered in secret at a woman being so sensible.’

‘Oh, Charlotte is very sensible,’ said Miss Adela, growing grave of a sudden, as with the responsibility of the sentiment. ‘Everybody says so.’

‘Ah, yes,’ said Mr. Crowle, in a gentle enthusiasm ; ‘she is above us all. Ah, Miss Adela, she is not to be named with a Beau in the Stocks.’

‘Don’t be so sure of that,’ said this odd child. ‘I could tell you something, but I won’t. It would make you too vain.’ And then bounded away. And by-and-by she was telling her junior sisters what fun she had with Mr. Crowle, and how she had humbugged him into thinking Charlotte was in love with him.

These juniors were all she-Arabs in the house, and, what is called, badly brought up.

Mr. Crowle finished gathering his flowers, and thought how cleverly he had played upon this bit of nature. No one knew so well as he his chances and his station, and how almost ridiculous would be such an idea, when taken in reference to such a person as Miss Franklyn. He was a shrewd, sensible person himself, and almost smiled at the notion. Still, *he* was not moving in the business; and with the dilapidated fortunes of the house, who knows, but that this might be some family scheme. He would welcome it with all heartiness. His father was a currier—a living currier; and the currying process was every day spreading to his sensibilities. He would await events and make no sign; and so went in with a certain elation. Something had been sown which might come up years after—a very remote growth, but, still, something agreeable to speculate on.

In the drawing-room he was marvellously agreeable, and the youngest young man of

business ever dreamt of. As he ascended the stairs, he feasted on pleasing visions of the future.

He was a very sensible 'long-headed' man, this young man of business, and there was no vulgar forwardness in his demeanour that night. If there was any change, he was more retired. Still, the idea of purifying that currier streak out of his system came back to him very often.

The evening post had just come in, and was opened greedily—like all posts, morning or evening. The letters were sorted and distributed by unpaid officials. Mr. Franklyn got his—a good many; the young ladies theirs—a few; Mr. Franklyn went through his slowly and without enthusiasm. No wonder, for they seldom bore him a horn of good news. Looking over one specially, he hemmed audibly twice or thrice, which was known in the family as a sign that he wished the attention of the crowd to be directed to him. The crowd became silent and eager.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Franklyn, 'this is a

little sudden, I had not expected him so soon.'

'Who? who, papa?'

'Young William Craven; he is coming to-morrow. Still I am very glad. A room can't take long to get ready.'

This was supposed by the populace to be Charlotte's admirer, *en titre*. So, conscious glances went round, and the girl who had lately been in office as a 'terrible child,' but was still holding on, as it were, a minister without portfolio, jogged her neighbour and laughed aloud. The sensible girl was not the least perturbed.

'The front room, I suppose, papa?' she said.

'How long is he to stay, papa, dear?' said one of the family.

'A week, he writes,' said Mr. Franklyn; 'but of course we won't let him go so early. He is a most agreeable young man to have in a house. You will all like him.'

The ex-terrible child said demurely, 'Of course! What does Charlotte say? Eh,

Charlotte? She is the only one that knows him as yet.'

'You will see to-morrow,' said the sensible girl; 'it will be a wholesome lesson for you to curb your impatience.'

'Something splendid!'

'A noble youth, of course!'

'All the virtues!'

'Adonis! Brave, haughty, gallant,' &c., &c.

These were all so many shafts launched at Charlotte. Not one hit.

'She is getting red—look!' said the ex-terrible.

'Foolish children,' said the sensible girl, quite cool and unmoved; 'you should be all sent up to your nurseries.'

CHAPTER V.

JENNY AT HOME.

UP at Chesterfield Street, things were gloomy enough. The lady of the house was to be ill in permanence, better one day, and more than worse the next. Doctors came in flocks—four at least—on the day fixed for a consultation; and their four decent carriages, quiet, demure vehicles, kept about the premises, in a sort of procession, as though they had come already for the funeral, and were waiting for the hearse.

Two of the medical gentlemen wore white ties, and were about as clean and varnished as clergymen; the others were rude, disorderly persons, not too nice with their razors. The sick lady upstairs was, metaphorically speak-

ing, in the hands of one of the medical gentlemen,—she was the Case, and *his* Case. He had taken out his licence, and these were his shooting grounds. He took his three friends upstairs to exhibit his prey or quarry, not without a certain pride. He lectured over her fondly ; said now and then, ‘ You see, eh ? ’ to which they answered in dry chorus, ‘ Ha, hem, quite so ! ’

He took his stethoscope out, applied it to the chest of the patient, and for some minutes seemed to be looking with his ear through a sort of telescope. His brethren, then, all came in turn, and looked as though looking with their ears through a telescope. The profound wisdom and ineffable depth of knowledge portrayed in each professor’s face, as he withdrew his face from the operation, it would be impossible to describe. This species of autopsy on a living subject being concluded, they then withdrew, gravely, and even sadly, and adjourned to a private chamber below to consider their verdicts and take sherry and biscuits. That verdict was scarcely encouraging. Lungs

‘touched’—liver ‘touched’ a good deal—general interior economy all more or less ‘touched’—and, above all, heart ‘gone.’

‘You see,’ said Sir Hervey Parkes to Jenny Bell, trying to work his throat free, as it were, out of his white collar; ‘you see, it is very critical, very critical indeed. Our patient’s life is on a thread—on a thread—a breath—a motion—you understand. No agitations—no sudden shocks—everything soothing—ev-e-ry-thing soo-o-thing—you understand.’

Jenny’s mournful eyes fixed themselves wistfully on the physician-in-chief. Oh! so sadly and wistfully. ‘What?’ she said, and her round full fingers became clasped together; ‘no hope, sir? Do you mean that? Oh! sir.’ The distinguished physician took her for the affectionate and best loved of all the daughters. He had been pleased with her quiet manner all along. She deserved his approbation. ‘My dear Miss Maxwell,’ he said, making an uneasy effort to work himself free from his collar, ‘I don’t say that. We may work through—for—oh, dear me, yes—

an indefinite period. But we must have care ; an emulcient treatment—if you can follow me in the use of the term—strictly emulcient. I must speak plainly, and put no fine points on the matter—hem, you will understand. But the fact is—our dear parent—yours, that is—is in a critical way. A breath—a gust—and——’ Here the eminent practitioner finished the sentence with a gentle snap of his fingers. ‘Still, with care—oh yes—with care, with kee-air,’ and he finished this sentence with an up-and-down movement of his head, which, in the language of the human person, is significant of mild encouragement. He was very much pleased with Jenny, and went away saying to his brethren : and so ‘well regulated’ (that was his word) a girl for a sick chamber he had rarely encountered.

It was Jenny’s function to press the daily fee into the reluctant palm, according to the surreptitious laws of the guild. She performed the unholy action with the conspirator-like stealth proper. Shall we live to see the time when the barristerial community shall accept

their fees in a stealthy, skulking fashion, with averted eyes, and a hand protruding backwards from the folds of the gown, into which adroit attorney shall chink his gold? Is the Guild of Mediciners the only one whose delicacy is to be consulted?

The suffering lady, then upstairs, was to float on smoothly to the end of her days. Every nerve of the family was to be strained to ensure her quiet. Every one was to creep up and down and about the house with cat-like steps. The worst was, she was sharp of temper, testy, a faded fashionable lady; long out of office, chafing against restraint, and eager for the fray again. She put no faith in these old lady stories of 'heart gone,' and 'touched lungs;' she would be well in a month or two. So here was the problem, that 'emulcient' treatment it would be hard to fit to such a subject.

CHAPTER VI.

THE 'SCOUR VALLEY' BILL.

MR. MAXWELL was wholly outside such associations, yet not indifferent as a husband. He was more dull than indifferent. What could he do? He was being worked like a beast of burden; he was being driven round and round in a sort of committee ring, performing legal 'scenes in the circle,' from morning till night, with attorney gentlemen in the centre scourging him round and round. The committee gentlemen sat in the boxes and looked on. He really *would* have grieved—grieved sincerely—had he been given time for that emotion. But his brain was greedily absorbing everything—feelings, emotions, sensibilities, even will. The demon of sixth House of

Lords' cases had entered into him, and had swept the whole premises clean. It had brought other demons' reports, and the statutes—terrible lodgers—who kept the House all to themselves. What could he do, save, indeed, furnish to Jenny, who gently suggested it to him in the morning, supplies of those golden eggs which the medical profession requires the patient-goose, or goose-patient, to have new laid every day.

But besides, Mr. Maxwell, Q.C., was now plunged deep into a tremendous pool of railway battle, and was struggling across through heaps of floating, stagnant matter. There was now actually before the committee the Scour Valley Railway Bill, promoted by the Monster Leviathan Line of the country, the huge Polypus Company, which was stretching out feelers north and south and west, and in those directions crawling over the face of the land. One of their feelers took a little bend, which on the map might be as the curve of the little finger; and these giants now proposed sweeping direct through this lovely Scour Valley, a

sweet pastoral nook, dear to anglers and trout lovers, in order to cut off about eight miles of country. As the grand Polypus flew screaming through the kingdom, express, this was supposed to save ten precious minutes of vast importance to commercial gentlemen of the bag. And yet, reasonable as this project would appear, in those days when economy of time is so justly considered, it was opposed—opposed grudgingly, snarlingly, not with tooth and nail merely, but with claws, and fangs, and talons—opposed incomprehensibly by another monster society, a sort of Midland Polypus, in whose instance the Legislature, having made a clean cut transversely across the kingdom, gave them a sort of interest, which stretched away at both sides, and every year increased. These two grand Polypi, one crawling away northerly and westerly, the other diagonally, indirectly, as it were, shared the country between them, and in some way obstructed any smaller schemes which broke out in those directions. Welcome to each were their legitimate spoils. But there were angles where the Polypi came


near, and almost entangled their feelers ; and there were little choice and dainty spots over which the shadow of the Northern feelers hovered, and over which the Midland longed to crawl, and over these debatable bits there was terrible railway 'bad blood' and locomotive soreness. So was it with the Scour Valley line, for which, up to that moment, no one had been solicitous, and of which few had heard. A wretched little water-shed. The eight-mile saving of time was a pure blind. It was all a mere sham, and over that wretched little corner the two monster societies fought out their deadly quarrel.

The committee room where the judges sat was as a sort of museum lecture-room, framework being introduced, on which were spread out plans, sections, elevations, a perfect acreage of cartridge paper, as though that branch of the Honourable House had turned itself into a gigantic laundry, and was striving to get through a large order in the table-cloth direction with as much speed as possible. Things were set out with a lavish effort at simplifica-

tion, a magnifying over and over again, so as to bring the idea (whatever idea it was) home to the meanest (committee) capacity. You could walk at an easy pace round the room, and follow the whole course of the Scour Valley line, displayed in brilliant colours, and brought conveniently on a level with the human eye. This was on a scale of some three yards or so to a mile, which are magnificent proportions in engineering plans. But lest even this magnitude should not reach to the committee, there were elegant extracts, as it were, of the Scour Valley line portrayed in gigantic cartoons at higher elevations, like the full-length portrait of 'a gentleman' at exhibitions; to be reached and have its beauties expounded by the agency of a wand. These works of art were distinguished by monster lettering, and the flashiest of colouring, so as to reach speedily to the committee's intellectual level. Its easy lessons might have done for a metropolitan infant school, with diagrams hung round, speaking with a superfluous intelligibility to the eye.

Thus on the lower level was made out indistinctly a little pale blue bridge which actually crossed this notorious river Scour by two arches. Higher up, this bridge had of a sudden developed into Brobdignag proportions, and had every stone distinct and conspicuous. A little more to the right, in the same region, was the bridge again, only cruelly cut across from pathway to pathway, and labelled 'SECTION.'

A good deal turned upon this bridge, and on the Scour generally. The bridge was of the Northern Polypi; but in a handsome sort of way the Western Polypi were coming forward to protect the owners of the adjacent banks, fishing rights, and general privileges, and were even prepared with a plan of their own, which would take the line—their own—across the Scour at a high level through a lattice bridge. There were models, too, of both bridges, witnesses in platoons from the Scour Valley, squires and engineers in regular corps. There was what is called a 'strong' bar for both sides. There was much printing, much



lithographing prettily done and coloured, and bound up with counsels' briefs, and furnishing those gentlemen with some field for absent or vacant scribbling. Everything was lavish and of the best, the paper the very finest. The eminent parliamentary agents spared nothing, knowing pretty well that nothing would be spared to them. They showed all the considerate munificence of undertakers (as they were indeed in some sense) at a moment of a bereavement.

Mr. Maxwell was on the opponents' side, the injured Westerns, who had been forestalled by the greedy Northerns. The fight was desperate. No one would have known *him*: the absent, vacant, timorous man of domestic life, now became noisy, combative, and actually collaring Boggs, Q.C., with ferocity. The two rolled over each other, gripping their throats, with loud snarlings, many times in the day, until Mr. Marshley, M.P., came and tore them asunder. They wrangled over witnesses as over bones. Mrs. Maxwell never knew the Maxwell of the committee rooms; it was an-

other man. Had she heard his voice she would have passed by, and not owned him.


The witnesses—such witnesses!—who stood there, herded helplessly like the cattle which some of them drove; who hung about the galleries with a timid air—with a proud air; who sucked sticks; who wore agricultural coats, with capes; who hugged primitive umbrellas affectionately; who seemed to have a vested property in the local solicitor, and clung to that unhappy officer as with a sense that he was responsible for their maintenance and keep in the great Babylon; who were getting lost, and being brought back ignominiously; who were getting drunk and utterly helpless—a perfect burden on the wretched solicitor, who, besides the labour of telling over his men about a dozen times in the day, like a sergeant his soldiers, was besides incumbered with a helpless *caput mortuum*, sadly gone in drink. This alcoholic affliction at times took the shape of frenzied violence, of loud screams, and general combativeness, which were, however, not to be controlled by the arm of the law, the

introduction of which would wound a witness's sensibilities, but had to be soothed into tranquillity by the wretched local solicitor in person.

The engineers were remarkable. On them seemed to rest the whole burden of the case, and they knew it. Four were marshalled on each side,—short and wiry engineers, tall and burly engineers, spectacled and unspectacled engineers, all fighting the battle with the zest and hostility which belongs to that and to the medical guild.

When Mr. Tummins, C.E., the local professional, was placed in the chair, to support the Northern Polypus view of the Scour Valley, and had his plans put into his hands, and was examined by Boggs, Q.C., with a skill and fluency, and familiarity with technical terms, which would have led a careless public to suppose he had handled theodolites in infancy, and had been busy taking levels all his life, four pairs of engineering eyes glared at him from the other side of the table, and at each answer four heads came together and tossed

contemptuously, and four mouths uttered disparaging whispers. But what was this to the time when Mr. Bagley, C.E., the 'eminent' engineer who had constructed the famous Bilston Reservoir, and built that wonderful viaduct of fifty-six arches across the river Leathy, under which a seventy-four might pass with the greatest ease—which was justly the wonder of the empire, but had made the shareholders bankrupt; when this gentleman took his seat in the chair, and with a calm, smooth impassibility, gave his testimony, the engineering eyes opposite were awed into respect. Only one, Mr. Cox, C.E., almost 'eminent,' also associated with some 'daring' bridges, which had excited wonder, but impoverished shareholders, was consumed with a secret gnawing envy, and turned yellow. His examination—Mr. Parsee, M.P., the eminent Parliamentary counsel, had reserved him for himself as a sort of legal tit-bit—occupied nearly two days, and when the committee rose, it was known that his cross-examination would be undertaken next morning by Mr. Maxwell, Q.C.



These counsel of Parliament have wonderful gear and machinery, strangely universal. The wheels and cogs and drums of their brain fit, by a little adjustment, any description of material. They are omnivorous, and can take in and work up wheat and chaff indifferently, medicine and drugs, machinery and the nice laws of mechanics, mathematics and formulas, optics, refraction of lenses—as when dealing with a lighthouse patent, and all the niceties of poisons, so as to be fitted to do battle for a couple of hours with Doctor Taylor. Let all this multifarious range be once 'briefed' to them, and it is ready for entering the machine. It is all one in the legal parlour the night before; a single handle sets all to work. Round fly the wheels with hum and burr. The properties of matter, the co-efficients, the densities of iron, the strain it will take without breaking, and such awful matter (awful, at least, in being played with *vivâ voce*—reasoned upon *coram publico*) as the formula:—

$$ab - \frac{z}{2c} = \text{twice the focal distance.}$$

These are wonderful magicians certainly. And such a magician certainly was Mr. Maxwell, Q.C.; and feeling the responsibility of Mr. Bagley, C.E., the 'eminent' engineer who was held over for his special handling on the morrow, he was now down in his workshop digesting civil engineering and all its intricacies.

CHAPTER VII.

JENNY'S HELP.

LEVELS, gradients, one in thirty-five; bridges 'askew' and otherwise; traction; these things fly off like sparkles. Still their briefs are barren enough, and he must have principles, broad and bold, which shall have a fine ringing sound in the committee-room, and confuse Bagley, C.E.

For this end he bethinks himself of an ancient Cyclopædia (Britannica, or Scotica, or Hibernica), splendidly garnished with diagrams, gorgeous cuts, dotted lines, and what not. It had been useful on a former Bill. By and by he rises, and begins to burrow among Measom and Welsby, Carrington and Payne, Tudor's Leading Cases, and Parkins' Appeal Cases. Do

what he will, however, he cannot find it, and stands with his hand to his weary forehead at about nine at night, in a cloud of dust. Suddenly it occurred to him—the girls! They loved picture books, and it had been borne up stairs, subjected to rude usage, and converted into a toy.

They were aghast at the apparition of that awful face! On the little circle fell consternation, from gentle Jenny downwards, who presided. The girls were working; Jenny sat in an arm-chair, a comfortable article, and read (to herself) out of an octavo volume covered with white paper. No doubt she was fortifying herself for the next day's scholastic duties, for in shape it was like their French 'Lecteur;' yet why cover up so useful a manual with this tenderness? Jenny almost gave a little shriek or gasp, as the lord of the mansion stood before them with his pale face, then stood up respectfully, and slipped her handkerchief over the book.

None of them had seen the book of plates. In truth they were not capable of that profa-

nation. Bear away a sacred volume? No, indeed! What if it should have turned out Parkins on Appeals! Those volumes they regarded as actually instinct with life, and had an undefined terror that those of the folio order would, on any insult, fall and crush them, like the helmet in 'Otranto.' Timorous sounds from all sides repudiated the notion, and the apparition, with an audible and deep-drawn sigh, seemed to fade out into darkness.

This troubled him. The briefs were so *very* barren, an unusual blemish in documents of the sort, and he began once more delving, burrowing, shovelling, among Parkins and Co., tossing them out like clods of earth and lumps of clay. He was blinded with dust, and yet his labour was ineffectual, and the hours went by. With a sigh he gave it up, and went back to his briefs, as it drew near to twelve o'clock.

Suddenly the door opened softly—very softly—and Jenny glided in; the round, compact figure of our Jenny. He looked up from his paper absently, yet was not astonished. He thought she had come to ask for something,

and looked up inquiringly, with his pale face; then, when he found she did not speak, dropped it again, and relapsed into the Brief world. In a moment he had forgotten her. Our Jenny had a velvet foot, though so roundly made—tripped across to Parkins and Co., Measom and Welsby,—lying all tumbled and in confusion—and went down on her gentle knees like a maid-of-all-work.

For three-quarters of an hour she mined and laboured in the dust, until the round full hands became all grimed, and then, in a corner, lit upon the engineering quarto. She got up, captured him, drew him from his ambushade, wiped him down with a cloth (poor Jenny knew little about proper dealings with the Book Family, who should have the dust blown tenderly from them, or they become greasy), set it gently before Mr. Maxwell on the table, and floated softly from the room. Anything so considerate, so tenderly done, and with so little of pomp or flourish, it would be hard to conceive.


He did not wake up into the world for a good

half-hour afterwards, when he was plunged suddenly into an engineering slough, and thought again of the great Cyclopædia as a sort of helping hand to draw him out. Then his eyes lit on the familiar chiel just beside him, blinking at him tranquilly. He was confounded—amazed—for he knew the space was vacant but a moment ago. He puzzled over it a few seconds, yet without losing time, which was precious; when the figure of our gentle Jenny rose before him—a picture, too, of her delving in the corner. Gradually it took shape; and as he turned over the huge books, he said, quietly—‘A thoughtful act—a very thoughtful act indeed.’

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF 'A FINE WOMAN.'

THE early portion of the life of Frederick Maxwell, Esquire, Q.C., would not bear much microscopic power. He sat lost in the wild prairies of embarrassments, bills, straitened means—in the district where no sun shines, and where the air is close and unwholesome, and where there are mephitic vapours rising from swamps, and where there are unclean and dangerous beasts of prey abroad. For long he had actually lived, helplessly, among these creatures. They had him in their power. He was ankle-deep in the swamps, and could not extricate himself. Finally, getting bound, as it were, to a curious ornithological development



common to the bush—a sort of damaged attorney, clumsily repaired and restored—it came to be whispered that he had married the damaged attorney's daughter. These were mere vapours that floated out of the district of the dismal swamp, absolutely intangible, which no man could grasp in his hand, and so might have been inventions of those enemies who grudged to Frederick Maxwell, Esq., and to the lady of Frederick Maxwell, Esq., that weight of power and influence to which they afterwards attained.

The damaged attorney, whose fingers were much stained and soiled with paddling in nasty waters, had been a flashy, pinchbeck man, and had a flashy, gaudy daughter, who was, as it were, a sign for his house-of-call. There he gave flashy, gorgeous dinners, and with his stained fingers gave a sort of forced and hearty welcome to favourite comers. Mr. Maxwell was one of these ; with the cunning of the serpent in the committee-room, but with the helplessness of infancy in his domestic life, he, indeed, fancied this young person, and was rather

dazzled, as are contemplative men, by the general garishness of the effect. The details do not affect this story, so need not be dwelt on with particularity here. In some way it came about. At last it came round, that Mr. Maxwell—not yet Q.C.—took with him to the altar the lovely and accomplished, &c., &c., according to the formula. A very unsuitable match, as indeed he half suspected; and he, with a sort of relief, now that it was off his mind, went to his Year-books, while ‘the lady of Frederick Maxwell, Esq.,’ went back to her milliners, who were a dozen strong.

These ex-flashy women, and old gentlemen’s ‘fine women, egad!’ are costly things in their kind. The damaged attorney’s daughter was no exception. She rioted among fineries, and raged wantonly among silks and laces, and the general splendour of wearing apparel. Before half-a-dozen years were out, Frederick Maxwell, Esq., that rising barrister, was wakened up one morning from third Carrington and Payne, and second Clarke and Fenelly, by the presentation of Madame Delphine’s little account,

which, for silkeries and general gauzy gear, stretched to a frightful extent.

Wonderful, how the mere decoration of this clay tenement can reach to so much. F. Maxwell, Esq., might have purchased a compact estate for the money, and turned all the laces and ribbons into good substantial land. Moneys which the rising barrister had been coining surely and steadily, all sank into the millinery morass, and were swallowed up. Madame Delphine was easy, and even good-natured; took bills and paper generally for what could not be so readily furnished; and, what was really more indulgent still, allowed the flow of articles to stream on simultaneously. But, in five or six years more the stream got choked and dammed up again. Madame Delphine of a sudden lost her soft and engaging manner, and became stern, hard, and almost ferocious; and Frederick Maxwell, Esq., again found that another small estate might have been purchased with the silks. This time he was helpless. By desperate efforts, and heavy mortgage for many years to come of brain,

time, health—everything, some arrangement was effected. But from that their life was altered. Mrs. Frederick Maxwell must cease to be flashy at such cost; and had even some glimmering of sense to see the folly of such a course. Before this time, too, the damaged attorney, stepping carefully, and picking his steps across the Chat-moss of dark money transactions, had tripped and been smothered in a bog-hole, whence, long afterwards, exhaled gases of imposture or cheating, or, as some whispered it, forgery.

All this while, too, when Frederick Maxwell, Esq., was busy with his briefs down in the well he called his study, Mrs. Frederick Maxwell wore that splendid gear, for which he was responsible, at public places, and moved along, escorted by many gallant gentlemen; for these gorgeous feathers which make such gorgeous birds, must have some more direct profit in the wearing, than merely feeling them on the human figure. Of this retinue was Colonel Fondleman, Captain Freelove, Carter Lee, and others. They walked behind her in a sort of

procession. They grouped themselves about her throne, whence she talked foolish things, and voiced the loud laugh with a rather harsh and unfeminine voice. Ancients, bewigged and bedyed, looked on from afar, and mumbled their old chant about a 'something' fine woman,—which she was, if largeness, volume, and general spreading expanse of figure and dress, make up that ideal. Carter Lee was, perhaps, some paces in advance of the others, and went about to the various entertainments the 'fine woman, sir,' attended, a sort of commissioned admirer—just as the Italian gentlemen do. And Mr. Frederick Maxwell, the rising counsel, stayed at home, and worked in the legal galleys, morally blind, deaf, and, perhaps, indifferent; and a good-natured fashionable public shrugged its shoulders and looked funny, and infinitely knowing, as that 'fine woman, egad, sir!' beat up the drawing-room, laboured heavily through doorways, with noisy rustling of stiff, crackling silk.

Still, these 'fine women' are built of sadly perishable materials. They are showy plaster

edifices, which, after much wear and tear of the elements, begin to shrink and grow awry, to peel, and get smirched. Something could be done by way of temporary restoration, but not much. So, after a few years, very rapidly the 'fine woman' began to fall out of repair—to collapse, decay, and crumble; the official admirers dropped away, one by one; and, what was worse, some of the inner stays and girders of the edifice began to give; and hence came that 'gone' lung and 'gone' liver, and very rapidly 'going' heart. Very soon the edifice was beginning to get ruined, and to be shored up by stout supports. It was all over; the noon-day of fashion was past; with it had sunk the homage, the worship, sham or real, the professional admirers, the rustling finery. Here was invalidship and strict confinement at home. Presently, but how soon was quite uncertain—it would be night.

The children which this estimable lady furnished to Frederick Maxwell, Esq., were eight, ten, and twelve years old. Ten and twelve were two dead-level species of girls—helpless,

fat, timorous, useless, and never likely to be made much of; but eight was a boy, Jack or Jacky by name, of a very curious pattern. Not like his father, the very few people said—oh, no—who were privileged with a private view of him; not in the least like his mother, oh! dear, no, again. A strange boy and an ugly boy, with sharp, restless, travelling eyes, and a face like a nursery fire-shovel. Not by any means a boy whom charming ladies would woo over to their knees, with tender invocation, would stoop or grow rapturous over, chatter to sweetly, with head bent down. He was a kind of decent domestic city Arab, not mischievous, or getting into dirt and trouble from breakage, or smearing his cheeks, but clever, silent, and wise. These three had Jenny now begun to govern. The pair of girls, below contempt in a governing sense, she found a very easy task, being poor, unintelligent souls, almost agricultural in mind; but this boy, Jack, she, somehow, did not relish from the beginning. It was hard, so young and fresh a creature as our Jenny should be set to the

pilotage of such a thing. Johnny, Jenny used to say, with a deep sigh, had, some way, never taken to her from the beginning. 'One of the best children in the world; a boy with a great deal of good in him, and great promise, except—except that one little fault, if fault it could be called, of not knowing who were his friends. A cold child, a reserved child—in fact, a very curious child generally.' And Jenny sighed again, and people said, 'What a task that pretty, fresh young governess must have with that loutish, mulish cub of a boy!'

It was, indeed, trying to discover a pair of sharp, prying eyes fixed upon every little proceeding our Jenny might be engaged in; and it showed a very odd and perverse temper in the child. Sometimes, a little languid with the strain of training childish intellect, she would absently raise her eyes to a small glass, opposite which the table for the books and general work happened to be placed, and for a second would absently contemplate her own round warm-coloured face, and, with a gesture almost instinctive, would smooth the outer edge of her

hair, with great pains and diligence. On concluding this simple operation, it was annoying to find the ugly boy, Jacky, utterly abstracted from his 'Pinnock' (Jenny always relished the simplicity of that once popular teacher, and his clear flowing method of question and answer, which left so little to the caprice of the teacher), and gazing stupidly at her face.

No less annoying was it, of a tranquil evening, when the day's labours were over for Jenny, and she was supervising their evening recreations, in a very ample and luxurious arm-chair, busy with a small foreign printed volume, whose cover was covered with white paper, to keep it from being soiled, to find this ugly child staring stupidly at the paper-covered book with a wonderful intensity. Jenny felt convinced he knew perfectly well what the character of the book was, and that if he could, he would have read it for himself. She, indeed, was only trying, at these little spare moments, to acquire a proficiency in foreign tongues, so necessary for a poor girl that has to do battle with the world; and had actually

waited one morning on Mr. Maxwell, rousing him out of Sixth House of Lords' Cases, to ask, very modestly and timorously, if he would object to her subscribing to M. Bernardi's foreign library for German works of a historic character, as her 'little charges' (so she always called them) must soon think of commencing that now necessary branch of modern education. Mr. Maxwell, with ghostly abstractions out of Sixth House of Lords' Cases still hovering between him and Jenny, grasped indistinctly that something was required for the house ; said, 'Yes—certainly—of course;' and instantly, Serjeant Rooker's point bursting on him in all its splendid breath, flew back into House of Lords' Cases as though he were in a legal rabbit-warren, and became lost to the world.

And, thus privileged, Jenny improved herself in the French tongue ; the German she did not lay her mind to as yet.

M. Bernardi, whom she visited in person, was really taken with her modesty and freshness, and remarked to his French foreman something metaphorical about her being a 'dish' rather

'*piquant et fort appétissant.*' And he himself, in person, made her up little square chests of all the newest things by the best French chroniclers—that is to say, by the brilliant school of M. Soulié, M. Dumas, junior, the ingenious author of '*Psalambo*;' and sometimes, by way of a makeweight, one of the diverting cabinet pieces of the late M. de Kock, of facetious memory. These latter, however, in the earlier days of her subscription, Jenny sent back, with a little note to 'kind M. Bernardi'—a little note that actually blushed, and in which she said she could not follow M. de Kock, and did not understand him, and she was afraid—in short, would 'kind M. Bernardi' send her something else? And 'kind M. Bernardi,' showing all his teeth, said with delight to his French foreman, that she was '*coquine*,' and that she '*intrigued*' him '*joliment*;' to whom the French foreman rasped a few complimentary consonants. And 'kind M. Bernardi' at once snapped up a bright, fresh, clean thing (outwardly, at least), in a shining pink cover, that was, twelve hours ago, on M. Amyot's counter, in the Rue de la Paix,

entitled 'Nuit,' par Paul L'Ouregan; and 'kind M. Bernardi' put up with it a rather humorous thing, by a new writer—Julie Camache—rising fast into deserved popularity, entitled 'Mon Bonnet de Nuit perdu!'

CHAPTER IX.

JENNY'S PERSECUTION.

OF nights, then, Jenny sat—rather nestled—in her arm-chair, very tired with her day's work; one of her plump feet gathered up, very much as the gentlemen do in their easy attitudes, and improved herself in the French tongue. She made her 'young charges' improve themselves also as she read, and did not allow them to romp and make a distracting noise, like ordinary ill-bred children. She kept a special watch on Master Jacky, whom she *poséd* sometimes at the table, sometimes in a corner—in fact, more often in a corner. For she told him she was sorry to see in him 'the seeds of a wilful and perverse temper,' which, unless they were 'eradicated' now with a firm hand, would

eventually be fatal to him, and bring him to a bad end. All which dreadful warnings he accepted placidly, and, as it appeared to Jenny, with a sort of secret contempt for her powers of forecasting the future, which indifference, not by any means outwardly expressed, did, indeed, make Jenny very sad.

Jenny, too, was very anxious about his deportment, and when she came to dull *fade* passages in the 'Lost Night-cap,' would bid him hold up his hands, or hold down his hands, as the case might be ; or to keep his chin up, and to 'do try and learn to sit like a gentleman.' And he was so ugly, and rusted, and awkward, as it were, in his joints, he would succeed very imperfectly, and assume loutish attitudes in his attempts, being, at the same time, very often surprised guiltily in that private staring to which Jenny had such an objection. On this she would take the trouble of actually getting up from her arm-chair and going over to him pretty briskly, jerking up his chin, and jerking down his hands with a little tartness very justifiable with such an aggravating boy.

Once he told her, ' You hurt me, Miss Bell, and pushed her arm away a little roughly ; and Jenny, who was naturally of a fine quick temper, and with nobody present, found the temptation irresistible, and the insubordination so gross, that, with that round, fleshy hand of hers, she gave him a smart, tingling little slap across the left ear. Our pretty Jenny was carried away for the moment. Strange to say he never cried, or even looked rueful, but turned away and fell to his book again.

With the *ex-officio* invalid upstairs, he was, curious to say, the favourite of all the family. The flashy woman, now out of office, and waiting for the 'heart to go,' as the mediciners called it, really had a niche or corner in that poor dilapidated organ for her boy ; and, it is believed, he, too, regarded her reciprocally. At least, it began to be a favourite motion of his, during those evenings when Jenny was getting more than usually persevering about his deportment, to say quietly—' Miss Bell, may I go up and sit with mamma ? ' and Jenny, who suspected this artful boy's prodigious du-

tifulness, and saw, as she fancied, a spiteful twinkle in his eye, could not well refuse a willing assent—the inculcation of dutifulness being part of the governess' curriculum. Altogether, then, it may be conceived, this artful pupil did not very much gain our Jenny's affection.

But what really was at the bottom of this unhealthy relation between mistress and pupil, was a little adventure arising out of some of M. Bernardi's books, and which indirectly brings us to Jenny's personal relation to Mrs. Maxwell, the *ex-officio* invalid upstairs, whose heart, on medical authority, was 'going.' These details may, perhaps, seem a little too abundant; but, as this is a sort of cabinet picture and Dutch family piece, they become almost essential.

Not very long after the visit of the Reverend Mr. Wells this very painful little incident had occurred:—One evening, about four o'clock, Mrs. Maxwell, now growing very querulous, and to be soothed *in omnibus* by medical direction—for as the chief

mediciner remarked, 'Our life hangs upon a mere thread'—sends down for an amusing book, with pictures, of which line of article the house is sadly destitute. An amusing book, 'with pictures,' and Frederick Maxwell, Esq., Q.C., in conjunction, did seem a comic possibility. There was, indeed, a sort of ancient, old-fashioned collection, which Mr. Maxwell's grandmamma had read out of and thought entertaining—novels such as 'The Hermit,' 'The Recluse'—each in three little volumes, Robertson's 'Charles the Fifth,' the late Mr. Arthur Young's works, and such matter. There were also a few old-fashioned French works.

But that Mr. Maxwell should be applied to for store of entertaining illustrated books was really entertaining. 'Tenth Vesey, Junior,' gorgeously illustrated by Tony Johannot, would be about as droll a concatenation. Jenny is very eager about it, and distracted almost in her eagerness, and at last thinks of a sort of landscape annual, which one of the girls had been looking over the night before

on the sofa. She therefore bids Jack go up and fetch it—he will find it on the sofa. Jack, who, but that he was commissioned from above, would not have been despatched on this duty, goes upstairs. About a minute after a sudden idea flashes on Jenny, and jumping up, she flew to the drawing-room, ran to the sofa and turned back the cushion. Something she had placed there was gone. Our Jenny's full round cheek turned pale, and her round foot, much regarded and commended as she picked her way through the streets, stamped upon the ground. In another instant she crept upstairs softly. But the bedroom door was shut, and she was not privileged, she knew well, to go in.

In about a quarter of an hour the maid came down and said that, please, Mrs. Maxwell wanted to see Miss Bell, please; and our Jenny thanked the maid sweetly for the trouble she had taken, and tripped upstairs at once.

‘Look here,’ said the invalid, a little excitedly; ‘look at this, please. These are nice

studies for one of his age ;' and she held over to Jenny a thin octavo, bound in green mottled calf, and which was open at an engraving. Jenny took it, turned it over with wonder, and as she read the name, manifested a sense of sincerest horror. It nearly fell from her fingers. It was a work called 'The Adventures of the Chevalier Faublas,' by the late M. Louvet, a persecuted Girondin, and was prettily illustrated with charming etchings, done with the old marvellous French delicacy, which quality, it must be confessed, confined itself mainly to the engraver's touch ;—what would be called an 'Edition of Luxury'—perhaps rather too much luxury on the whole.

It is to be feared the Chevalier had been reposing himself behind the sofa cushion, when that stupid, bungling boy had been sent up to fetch the picture-book. Jenny put the work aside with a gentle repulsion.

'How did he get this *awful* book,' said Mrs. Maxwell, excitedly. 'He says——'

'Indeed I found it behind the sofa cushion—indeed I did,' said Master Jack.

Jenny turned up her gentle, trustful eyes. 'Don't agitate yourself, dear madam,' said she; 'don't now. You know what Sir Hervey said. Leave it to Mr. Maxwell.'

'But we must have the truth. He must be telling a lie,' continued the patient, getting agitated. 'That dreadful book!'

'It must have been curiosity, dear madam—mere childish curiosity. He saw it on the shelf, and saw there were prints, and all children love prints. I assure you, dear madam, there can be no harm in it. These terrible things should have been burnt long ago, but we shall have them destroyed at once.'

'But the lie—the lie,' said Mrs. Maxwell. 'Who hid it under the cushion? To think of a child—such dreadful wickedness in one so young.'

'I didn't, mamma,' said the boy, fixing his eyes, with the old stare, on Jenny.

'Oh John! John!' said Jenny, designedly, 'don't—don't say any more. Don't add anything. There is no harm in what you have done beyond mere natural curiosity. Recollect

what Mr. Ryder Rodgers preached so beautifully on truth. Dear madam, I have a duty here to you—you are not to flurry yourself—Sir Hervey said so. You must let me be free enough to say that this is too exciting for you.'

'Oh,' groaned the patient, 'I am very ill. It's like a knife through my side. Go down—there!—both of you. Leave me.'

'Go, John; do you hear?' said Jenny, sternly, yet in soft suppressed sternness, and John went. 'You must let me, dear madam,' said Jenny, going over to the chimney-piece, and selecting a special medicine bottle, with accompanying wine-glass and spoon. 'It is the time—every three quarters of an hour. Sir Hervey——'

'I had it only a few minutes ago. I can help myself. There, leave it down—do—go away. Oh—oh—oh—this knife!'

The expression of our Jenny's face at this moment was the very essence of universal pity and compassion developed to the highest degree. She crept softly, first going over to

pick up the polluted volume for the incrimination ordained for it.

‘Where are you taking that?’ said the suffering lady. ‘Leave it, can’t you? You don’t want to read it—do you?’

‘No, no, no, dearest madam,’ murmured Jenny, and stole out finally.

The sick woman’s eyes followed her with a fierce, doubting look.

CHAPTER X.

MORE OF JENNY'S THOUGHTFULNESS.

THAT evening Mr. Maxwell heard some one tapping at his door. His finger was travelling down Clarke and Fenelly—that is, down the work of those gentlemen—in a sort of exciting chase of ‘a point.’ The ‘point’ was doubling like a hare—hiding here, there, in this bush and in that—over the page and over the page again, until finally, just as it was lost in a sort of thick undercover, Jenny’s tap was heard at the door. It came at a convenient moment, for the legal hare could wait conveniently in the brushwood until he came to beat it at his leisure.

Jenny entered, timorously, as she always

entered where there was one of the other sex present.

‘Well?’ said Mr. Maxwell, dreamily appreciating her presence, and still thinking restlessly of his legal hare. ‘Well, Miss Bell?’

‘I am afraid, sir,’ said our Jenny, ‘you are busy, and that I interrupt.’

She might be perfectly sure, both that he was busy, and that she *did* interrupt, and she made as though she would retire in utter confusion.

Suddenly, Mr. Maxwell, thinking of his legal hare, and where it might be hidden, by a natural association, turned back to the committee-rooms, and Serjeant Rebutter, and to the eminent engineer whom he cross-examined, and to the encyclopædiac book of engineering which Jenny had found. ‘Very thoughtful, indeed,’ he summed up. And thus, more abstracted from Sixth House of Lords’ Cases than usual, he made an effort and said, ‘Well, Miss Bell, what can I do for you? Pray sit down.’

Timorously Jenny sank into a chair.

‘Oh, sir,’ she said, ‘you won’t think me

troublesome—wasting your precious time ; but—but *could* you give me a little advice ? I am lonely and friendless ; my position is—is—very peculiar.'

A point of law, thought Mr. Maxwell, Q.C., wheeling his chair a little forward on its castors, and preparing to listen. This was more in his line.

'It is about John, sir.'

'John!' said Mr. Maxwell, disturbed.

'John! Who,—what is John?'

'Jack—John, sir,' said Jenny. 'Oh, I am so nervous, so agitated about him. It is a tremendous, an *awful* responsibility.'

'Oh yes, of course,' said he, a little wearily.

'Oh, sir,' said Jenny, 'I tremble for his future. He is good ; he has good intentions ; he is not radically wicked ; but—but——'

'Good gracious!' said Mr. Maxwell, 'I did not hear of this before. Why, what has he done?'

'Ah, sir,' said Jenny, hesitatingly, 'as I heard you once say to a professional person in the drawing-room, "if we have truth in our case, we have everything."'

On the recollection of this profound observation Mr. Maxwell grew more interested, and for the first time surveyed Jenny curiously. Again the same remark rose to his lips. 'A very thoughtful act of her, indeed!' He was becoming interested, and he at once made the room into a committee of the whole House.

'So Jack does not tell the truth, it seems he said.

'Oh, sir,' said Jenny, dropping her eye demurely, 'I *know* you think this childish-trivial—laughable.'

'No, no. Why so?' said Mr. Maxwell, astonished.

'You do,' said Jenny; 'you who are always busy with grand, with noble things—whose minutes are guineas—who have all the world rushing to you. But *you* know, sir, how delicate is *my* situation. But why should I trouble you with these little details? The fact is, I am grieved to discover in Johnny a certain disinclination, and I would ask you, sir, to speak with him. He will attend to *you*, sir.'

'What!' said Mr. Maxwell, 'do you mean t

say he does not respect what you tell him? If this be so——'

'I have tried to make him love me,' said Jenny, sorrowfully; 'but I am afraid—perhaps it is *my* fault; in fact, I am sure it is;—but we do not understand each other. I have not yet learned my trade;' and Jenny smiled a sad smile. 'I do not think anybody will ever love me!'

Mr. Maxwell was growing interested.

'But I had no idea of this; I thought Jack—what I have seen of him—was a steady, sensible, open-hearted child; not bright, certainly, but manly and honest.'

'So he is! so he is!' said Jenny, with enthusiasm. 'Indeed, it may be my fault. I am not fitted to manage him. He is of a good age; naturally will have more respect for men than for a mere poor foolish woman.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Maxwell, 'very true; he is getting on. I was just thinking now, it is time he should be sent to school. Yes, he had better be sent to school.'

Jenny gave a little start. What an idea!

She might have been thinking for days, poor weak woman that she was, but the strong intellect of man, how soon it resolved the difficulty. All this was to be read in bold text on Jenny's round face.

'I hope, sir,' said she, timorously, 'you will forgive this intrusion on your precious time. You know I have no one else in the house and my situation is peculiar.'

'Not at all,' said Mr. Maxwell; 'very good of you. I hope you will always——' His mind now began to stray a little towards Six House of Lords' Cases. 'By the way, as you found a book before, I suppose *you* could have—oh, no! that is quite improbable.'

'What, what?' said Jenny, with surprising eagerness, all the lamps in her face lighting up suddenly. 'Tell me, sir, *do* tell me, anything I can do.'

'Oh no; it is absurd. It was only a volume of old reports—Salkeld. Things get so astray here, my poor head gets bewildered; some words I never *can* find anything. There, thank you, Miss Bell.'

He was anxious to be back at that hare of Serjeant Rebutter's. Jenny gently glided away, but had taken a glance round, and saw how things indeed 'got *so* astray.' Shelves of the dun-coloured infantry of the law ran round the room, with their name and number blazoned on the scarlet colour of their uniform. But the ranks were all gapped and broken, as though riddled and cut up by a heavy fire. Some were tottering over, leaning against their fellows, some lying flat; all were in sad disorder. But the floor of the room was the most confused spectacle; it being like a street broken up, with piles of books instead of paving stones and rubble—a distracting sight; so that if a special work was wanted the seeker must take off his coat, and go down and labour like a workman. Altogether a wreck everywhere of books tumbled, scattered, lying open and shut, with strained backs and tossed leaves lying under the weight of other books; of briefs flung open, and sprawling over other books, in disreputable attitudes. In short, the whole was as though there had been a terrific accident,

and a train of Reports and legal incidents had been run into, and fatally smashed, and here was the *débris* lying in heaps.

Jenny took note sadly of this confusion as she faded out into the passage, and formed a little scheme of a very delicate and almost tender character. Mr. Maxwell, hurrying back to the cover where he had left the hare, said once more, as he ran, 'A thoughtful, sensible person—*very* thoughtful.' Salkeld, however, was not to be found; no, nor Ventris. And what was worse, a precious copy of Addison—not the ingenious essayist, who in this light is not by any means precious—but a gentleman of the same name who wrote matter upon 'Contracts,' between the pages of which he had thrust some notes of a 'rare' case, possibly 'unreported,' with valuable 'dicta' of Vice-Chancellor Owlet—this, too, he wanted for the Court or Committee. In short, everything was lost or going astray, and he had to hurry away, post down to Westminster or Lincoln's Inn, much fretted and put out.

As soon as he was gone, Jenny called her

'young charges' together. 'My dear girls,' she said, 'you are looking so pale and unhealthy, you don't walk enough. Grammar and French is pretty well in its way, but health before all. Go out now together into the fresh breezes of Burleigh Square. We will put off lessons a little.'

Where the fresh breezes of Burleigh Square circulated was a sort of large yard (as to size), and a patch of unhealthy and languishing verdure. Burleigh Square itself was an infant of but one year old; in all the newness and rawness of reeking plaster, some of which had got down among the grass. 'As for you,' she said, smiling pleasantly at Jack, 'you ought not to be allowed to go. Still, if you will try and be a good boy, and beg pardon in your prayers, we will try and pass it over. Truth, truth, my good children, should be the magnet of your existence; without it you may never hope to be either great or good. Go now, my dear children, go for your walk.'

The girls went out softly, impressed with a reverential feeling. The boy followed after

them more slowly. He presently stopped at the door, and fixing his curious eyes on her, said bluntly—

‘You know you put the book there yourself, Miss Bell; I saw you take it down on Tuesday, and you were reading it the other night after we went to bed.’ He then shut the door and went down after his sisters.

Jenny’s cheeks kindled at the infamous charge of the little wretch. Her eyes flashed. What spite! It would have been a wholesome correction to have gone after him, dragged him in, and made his wretched little ears tingle. The honest nature of our Jenny—(it is no discredit to confess it)—burned to inflict that penalty on him. Poor unprotected thing! it was unworthy—it was unequal. She with no friends! no one to trust to. No matter, he must be promptly sent to school, for his own good. Such a vindictive nature could be dealt with suitably only by men. So, for his own good again, must he be sent to school.

They being gone forth to the sward of

Burleigh Square, Jenny flits down to Mr. Maxwell's study, and enters that sacred enclosure. What she was about was perilous—housemaids were charged under terrible penalties—hanging, forfeitures of goods, and what not—to abstain from laying even a finger on the hallowed disorder. It was consecrated ground. And yet, here was our Jenny courageously breaking in, and laying out for herself the work of charity of bringing all things into smoothness again. She pitied—she compassionated that poor overworked hodman, with the dying wife and responsibility of children, absolutely a child himself.

So she set to work with diligence and with judgment. Marvellous what a tact and instinct she had in the labour! She seemed to hit on what books were more in request. In fact, our Jenny, whatever she laid herself to, brought with her a very nice instinct, a sort of intellectual *sçavoir faire*; and was pretty sure to make no conspicuous blunder. And so she smoothed away the heavy mounds of legal earth, levelled all things, brought together the

disunited family of Vesey—some twenty or so strong; gathered together ‘House of Lords’ Cases,’ which had a tendency to straggle to opposite sides of the room; set in order the loose pamphlet Reports—Part one, two, three, according to the series; and, by a better device, actually stitched firmly together a bundle, whose viscera were all bursting out. Finally, she actually disinterred the lost Addison—much strained and disjointed about his back and spine, with all muscular spring gone from his binding, from being kept too long open; and found there also the precious *dicta* of Vice-Chancellor Owlet. Nothing could be nicer or more symmetrical than the fashion in which she ranged these auxiliaries; Vesey, Junior, went home to his shelves, and the more necessary books were ranged to the right and left on the table, in the order of their use; while on his desk was set the recovered Addison, with the dislocations in his back skilfully ‘reduced,’ and the precious note of Vice-Chancellor Owlet supported on the convalescent Addison. Mr. Maxwell’s ink was usually a sort of stagnant

pool, and his pens utterly disorganized. The process of writing was a sad discomfort and torture. But all this 'service' was now re-organized, and our Jenny, with much good-feeling, brought down pens from her room—things that would write—and set them there beside the desk. There was nothing prodigious in all this ; but, somehow, it is the fate of these helpless men ever to want these species of little helps ; and it must be said again, that it was delicate, tender, and considerate for a mere simple governess to put herself out of the way in this manner.

CHAPTER XI.

JENNY AS SECRETARY.

MR. MAXWELL did not dine at home that day—if that was dinner which consisted in snatching at a piece of meat more or less underdone, and complimentarily named ‘a chop,’ and a glass of wine;—but when he came home at night, ruminating and ‘fretted’—for he had been ‘pressed’ during the day with a ‘point’ which Vice-Chancellor Owlet’s note would have settled—and entered his study; even his absent mind was struck by the change—the marvellous change. He could walk, the road was clear; the Fairy of Order had come down to earth. But when he saw Vice-Chancellor Owlet neatly folded on his desk, and the lost Addison, he was positively confounded. He first thought of

the housemaids, who had feloniously dared to intermeddle; but when he noted the method, the legal judiciousness of the handling—the Chancery-books set all together, and ‘House of Lords’ Cases’ well forward—he knew that here were no housemaid’s rude fingers. In fact, Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., with acute lawyer’s instinct, at once leaped to the conclusion he should have done; and said—‘Really a most thoughtful act;’ and repeating it again, added this—‘Really a most *kind* and thoughtful act.’

At breakfast next morning he returned his acknowledgments in, perhaps, an awkward way, to the wonder of the family, who were unused to such an exhibition. Jenny gracefully acknowledged it; and timorously said she was afraid she had been very meddlesome.

‘On the contrary, of inestimable service: I can draw breath now,’ said Mr. Maxwell. ‘I can ride—I can walk—I can find my way. So kind and considerate. I am really much obliged.’

At this moment Jenny noted Jack’s eyes again fixed on her, with the old strange ex-

pression. She coloured, and one side of her nice full cheek went down with a sort of ghost of a contortion.

Just at that moment, too, Mr. Maxwell's eyes fell upon Jack, and by natural association he thought of what Jenny had spoken yesterday touching his going to school. The equities of the case, as he would call it, required that this should be adjusted, and a person in her depending position, so 'thoughtful, so kind, and so truly considerate—a really invaluable person' to have in a house, should not be made uncomfortable. So, on the first opportunity, he went to see Mrs. Maxwell, to speak about Jack's removal to school.

Jack was sitting with her, reading, which was a popular duty with him. It has been said he was the favourite, if there was any, of the sick ex-fashionable woman—at least, she tolerated him more than the rest. This poor soul! with her warrant already in the sheriff's hand, was, of course, busy doing what cleansing and burnishing she could compass with her poor, soiled, fashionable old soul. The

book in Jack's hands was, of course, the suitable book for the occasion. It was a lively thing, called 'Willis's Rooms,' in three volumes—quite new, and said to be written by Lady Mantower's second daughter.

Jack was sent out with his book. The fashionable lady—very wan and attenuated, and every day gradually assuming that pale lead tint which is the precursor of the great change, and was thrown out in a curious relief by the white linen—wondered at this unexpected visit.

Mr. Maxwell opened his subject timorously. Somehow, he felt there would be opposition. So there was. The sick lady's eyes flashed up, the cords in her wasted throat quivered.

'He shall not go,' she said, tremulously. 'I know very well who wants to get him out of the house!—I know.'

Mr. Maxwell recollected the doctor's injunction and grew nervous, as he saw her agitation. He tried to calm her.

'You know it is for his good,' he said.

‘But don’t agitate yourself now ; we will talk of it again.’

‘But we shall *not*,’ said the sick lady, ‘so long as *I* lie in this bed ! You think because you keep me shut up here in this room that I don’t know what is going on. But I tell you who shall go ; she takes too much on herself, I can tell you. She——’

‘There—there,’ said he, seriously ; ‘everything shall be as you wish. He shall not go. There ; you know you are not to disturb yourself. I merely thought, as he was getting so big ; but there now, we shan’t speak of it. Of course this is your house, and you are mistress.’ And so he went down, wondering at the perverseness of sick people, and at the strange distorted views they take of things. That Miss Bell, who was so obliging, so thoughtful—so anxious to please all in the house ;—such a ludicrously perverted view to take of *her* !

While the sick Mrs. Maxwell—her heart thumping with the oscillations of a steam-engine—sank back, not without a certain glow of pride over her cheek. She was still mis-

tress, and acknowledged as such; and presently the rescued Jack was sent for again, and recommenced reading, in his accustomed drone, the select views of life set out in 'Willis's Rooms.' She presently told him the whole story. 'They wanted to pack you off to a large school, Jacky,' she said. 'You have to thank your friend, Miss What's-her-name, for that. She is not strong enough as yet for *that*. I shall take care of you, Jacky, never fear. And you keep your eye on her. I shall live longer than they think.' Which facts Jack took in steadily, much as he drank his tea of mornings—with a slow, measured suction. He only answered, 'Yes, mamma.' Very shortly after, she began to grow sleepy, even in presence of Lady Mantower's younger daughter, and was nodding. Jacky's duty was then over, and he crept away softly. Coming down, he stood in the drawing-room doorway, where Jenny was working, and said, in his stolid way, 'Miss Bell, I'm *not* to be sent to school,' then disappeared.

It was singular, indeed, the morbid feeling

with which the poor sick lady had begun to regard Jenny—the more extraordinary, too, as that young creature spared no pains, either of dutiful attendance or of delicate little soothing ways to win her over. The grimness of sickness or mere natural perverseness stood in the way.

It is certain it grew and gathered strength; and the sick lady grew pettishly curious about her and her movements, and magnified what were mere breaths and vapours into thick heavy clouds. It took the shape of a sort of intolerance—a sort of curious secret jealousy, utterly unaccountable.

It must be said, in justice to our Jenny, never was there a more gracious indulgence to a sick woman's humour, or a more kindly allowance. One of another mould would have promptly resigned her place, and gone out from among them. But she felt how cruel would be such a step to so disordered a maniac, and how helpless she would leave all behind. What, indeed, upheld her, too, was the silent support extended to her by the lord of the

mansion, wonderfully developed for one of his indifference to the world's ways—that is, the world outside the Committee—and which she acknowledged with silent gratitude. That this feeling on his part was daily strengthened may be well conceived, for it was brought home to him in many silent ways. What effectually established her in his respect and esteem, akin almost to the feeling with which he would regard Serjeant Rebutter, were some little incidents which shall now be detailed.

Being overworked—like the case of many overworked men—Mr. Maxwell began to break down in the eyes. These precious darling auxiliaries, so worked, so driven, so galled, and so cruelly treated, and who yet work until they drop, as it were—these precious things he found giving way. There were first clouds and floating specks—the usual forerunners; then swimming and rawness, and general sensitiveness to night light. Still there was a fitfulness—one day mending, another growing worse. Besides, the work *must* be got through—some injunction to move

or oppose—and it is wonderful how this feeling supplies physical defects. It carried Mr. Maxwell through, just as air does a fire. Distracted people do feats of strength, and take wonderful jumps, which confound them as they think of it afterwards. But, finally, Mr. Maxwell's eyes, now grown very hot and strained, came to closing up feebly as lights were brought, and could do very little work at all at night.

Of course, he went to Bradshaw, the eminent oculist, who got him into a dark room, and made a servant hold a taper, while he, Bradshaw, stared with a wonderful magnifier right into the ball of Maxwell's eyes. The verdict was, 'Chronic weakness, my dear sir; the vascular tissues all overcharged with blood; inflammation, my dear sir,' with other particulars. There was also another 'finding'—cessation from all night-work; with which comfort Mr. Maxwell went away; and with, also, a lotion.

This was terrible news for him. Even that very night there was work not to be postponed. An opinion set out in his own pale

handwriting, was about as illegible as a chart of the nervous system. Nobody had the knack of deciphering these signs—not even his own clerk, for they varied with every day; and he had no special character in his writing. His heart really sank at the prospect, for his legal occupation was to him food, meat, drink—life itself. The motion in this action was suspended. It was as though he were hurrying to decay.

Who in the house had marked his trouble so well as our ‘thoughtful’ Jenny! She had noted even the first pale pinkness of those orbs, before it had been announced officially, as it were. Hers were the steady inquiries of the morning; hers the gentle proffer of home-made lotions, not stamped *ex cathedra*, yet meant very well; hers, too, were the gentlest and most timorous remonstrances, hoping that he would excuse the freedom, &c., but that she knew the danger from fatal family experience; her own darling mother, from an over enthusiasm for the labours of the needle, having brought on, &c. (Who was Jenny’s mamma,

or was this ardour for sempstress's work something more than merely amateur?) She would timorously implore him—if not too great a liberty—for the sake of his darling ones, to be a little discreet.

But that night, when the 'opinion' was required, our Jenny showed her thoughtfulness in a yet more practical way. She first said to Jack, 'Go up to your dear mamma, Johnny, dear' (she never could bring herself to adopt the vulgarity of 'Jacky'), 'and sit with her.' Then she set some picture-books before the girls, and tripped away down stairs.

Below in his study, just beginning to try and copy out his 'opinion,' he found that it would not do. A sharp pain, an inexpressible sinking, as though his eyes were slipping away inwardly. It would not do, and he looked up blankly. Just then our Jenny tapped ever so softly at the door, as she always did, and entered.

It was on another 'thoughtful' mission. Would he allow her to help? Would he take her for his scribe? She was very patient, very industrious, would try and do her best;

and besides this (she added a little timorously), *thought* she knew his hand pretty well. Might she, at least, make the attempt?—she could only fail.

It was an enormous relief. Yet Mr. Maxwell could not believe, and shook his head sadly. Woman at this sort of work? No! no! She translated his thought for him at once. ‘You think, sir,’ she said, ‘because I have not been trained—because I am not a man. I know we are poor, feeble creatures; but, sir, we sometimes *do* our best.’

Mr. Maxwell shook his head, but less positively. He did not believe yet, but still he was pleased. He rubbed his hand across his poor, weak eyes. That, again, was another argument. ‘Well,’ he said, with a smile, ‘we can only try. It is very charitable,’ he added, with a dreamy air, being scarcely yet out of the Committee-room; ‘and very thoughtful, indeed. Would you sit down, then, here?’

He drew a chair over, shovelled away some of the heavy legal mould upon the table, to make a clear space, and set the ‘opinion’

before her, marked with all the straggling lines of the nervous system. But Jenny, whose innate ideas of delicacy were wonderful, hesitated a little. It was now gone ten o'clock. There was an awkwardness, in short, sir. Perhaps he would not have any objection, if one of the girls were to come down?

The girls come down! And he gazed at her in bewilderment. They could not write! Jenny, much embarrassed, was hanging her head. This dull Parliament man could not see it, until Jenny tripped away in confusion, and presently brought down 'one of the girls,' who was amazed at the new function put upon her, and sat in a corner, with a heavy book on her knee—'Gilbert on Uses,' I believe—which Jenny, in a sort of absent way, had put into her hands.

There was the new secretary, with Mr. Maxwell now walking about, now standing over her for a moment. Jenny had taken the roll of cuneiform inscriptions, and was laboriously yet surely working it out in her own clear hand. He dictated alterations. New legal

lights broke in on him. It was wonderful—extraordinary—the strange legal Argot and all. He was confounded, and stood beside her, following her flowing pen with wonder.

But Jenny was very intelligent. She really was acquainted with that barristerial hand. She was very familiar with Mr. Maxwell's—a familiarity no doubt acquired while she set his room in order. Nay, as for this very document itself—but this is pure speculation.

Speedily, intelligently, she did the work—the 'opinion' spread out neatly over the page. For a word here and there she paused, looking up timorously to her director. It came to eleven. The child, who was supporting 'Gilbert on Uses' on her knee, dropped off to sleep, and suffered that defunct Lord Chief Baron (for that was the quality of the late Gilbert) to slip to the ground, with loud noise. Both looked round.

'Poor child,' said Jenny, with deep sympathy, 'she has been kept up beyond her usual hour; poor, poor child.'

Mr. Maxwell came into the world again.

‘Poor child,’ he said also—it was doubtful to whom he applied it. ‘I am afraid I have been very selfish. This, I suppose, must do for to-night!’ And he drew a deep sigh, for he thought of the welcome vigils he so loved, when at an hour or two past midnight he took his way upstairs, weary, yet with a grateful weariness.

‘I am not tired,’ said Jenny. ‘I can write on for two hours to come. We must finish this to-night.’

‘But this child,’ said he, looking over at her who had dropped the Lord Chief Baron.

‘To be sure! *She* can go,’ said Jenny, in a flutter.

The girl, with weary eyes, stood up gladly.

‘Go to bed,’ said her father; ‘you must not be kept up any longer.’

‘But,’ said Jenny, timorously, ‘I am afraid the opinion cannot be done to-night. *I* could not——’

‘What!’ said Mr. Maxwell, almost despairingly. ‘You will not leave me. It *must* be done by to-morrow morning!’

The girl had fled away to her bed, leaving the Lord Chief Baron where he was, on the ground.

‘I must have it by the morning,’ said Mr. Maxwell. ‘Oh, could you be so kind? You have been of such aid to me, I never can sufficiently acknowledge.’

Jenny had wonderful sense. She had the rare instinct for seizing the situation, where scruples would be impertinent, and should give way. She thought of this poor, hard-working man-of-burden, and his trouble; his wistful look, his great sorrow, and the huge responsibility that rested on him. And was she, by childish humours and delicacies, to stand in the way?

Without a word more, she sat down again, took up her pen, and wrote on. In nearly two hours’ time the whole was finished—a neat specimen of penmanship; and when the last word was written, fled away, without waiting for the grateful thanks of her master. As he looked over her labour he grew very thoughtful. It was a Samaritan’s work,—no wonder

he was grateful; and as the hall clock was striking three, he passed upstairs, still ruminant and thoughtful.

Jenny that night, before retiring to bed, took out her little 'Letts' Diary.' She wrote in it something that must have been pleasing, for she smiled as she wrote. Sometimes, as she ruminated, words would escape her, for she was of an enthusiastic temper; and she really did murmur the name of a dear old friend, not seen now for a long time. 'Charlotte' was the name she murmured; thinking, no doubt, of the old time, and the sweet, pastoral breath of the country, contrasted with her present servitude. She turned back to another diary, to a special month, and found out the record of the last days of her stay at the Franklyns'; where, too, was that name of Charlotte Franklyn, with the cross + before it, and this she considered a long time very carefully. Sweet bygone times! She was not likely to forget them!

There was a letter all this time on her dressing-table, which, strange to say, she had

never noted—a letter with the Franklyn post-mark. She opened it eagerly. This was our curate's letter—our distracted curate's letter—of which mention has been made, and a portion of which, as it were, read to the reader. This journal of the doings down there, and the pleasant little gossip anent dearest Charlotte, dearest Jenny's friend, the coming of young Craven, and the pleasant family rallying on that subject.

Jenny was solitary—so there was no one to mark or be astonished at her reception of this welcome bit of news; but as she stood there, in a dim light, in a white dressing-gown, hair cast down, and universal *déshabille*, did she not suggest the notion of a sort of domestic Medea? And before she lay down to her soft, untroubled rest, she wrote a letter to dear Mr. Wells—an affectionate, grateful letter—thanking him, oh! so profoundly, for his consideration for 'the poor little exile;' such was the pretty name she had devised for herself.

She was longing, yearning, to learn more about her dear friend Charlotte; would it be

too much to ask her friend—and she might, she thought, call him her friend—her friend, then, Mr. Wells, to furnish her with any additional particulars, and as speedily as possible. Might she rely on him ?

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUNMOW PETITION.

BUT presently Jenny was to assist at far more important business. About a fortnight later, when his sight had mended a little by rest, some large white bales of what looked like linen—thick, ponderous, and unwieldy—were brought in. They were fresh and fragrant, and their style and titles were marked in bright characters outside. In short, the Great Dunmow Election Petition, after fluttering in all the uncertain balance of treaty, argument, feeble compromise, and even a little corruption, was now finally to go forward. The Hon. Noel Bashford, the sitting member, would defend his seat to the death; and Coxe,—Samuel Coxe, Esq., a local man of business—all efforts at amicable adjustment failing, was determined, according to the local paper, ‘to wrest

the constituency from the corrupt fangs of the Bashfords.' The Bashfords were little known in the borough; and it was said that frightful scenes of corruption had occurred during the days of the election. The Honourable Noel had money—Coxe had only principle. What was called 'unblushing' bribery had taken place. On the Hon. Noel's side, public-houses had been purchased up wholesale, and the land made to flow, mysteriously, with beer and other drinks. Magic dinners were spread, at which those who entertained friendly feelings towards the Hon. Noel might sit and feast gratuitously. It was even said, that two conscientious voters had been carried away and kept locked up in an old mill during the period they should have been exercising the privileges which a free country gave them. Altogether it was felt that the grand 'constitutional badge of freedom' had been scandalously outraged; and rich and abundant details were looked for. The files of counsel drawn up on each side were crowded. For the sitting member, Mr. Serjeant Rashley, Mr. Touch-

stone Shepherd, Q.C., Mr. Martin Welles, Q.C., and Mr. Folkstone and Mr. Prong. For the petitioner, Mr. Chetwood Smith, Q.C., Mr. Maxwell, Q.C., Serjeant Bendyer, and the great counsel, Mr. Edwin Bowles, Q.C., every minute of whose time weighed down a golden guinea in the other scale.

Retainers in proportion. Sums that made one gasp were 'on' each brief, conveying the pleasant notion of Eastern ways : a huge purse of gold possibly being inserted between the red tape and the snowy paper. Sixty witnesses for the petitioner were already in London, ^A living at suitable hotels, according to their degree, but under fierce espionage. A large committee-room had been set apart for the inquiry.

The petitioners congratulated themselves a hundred times in the day on having secured the services of Edwin Bowles, Q.C. The people of the sitting member, who were only late by some twenty minutes, had a corresponding gloom over them, and went into the battle with a sort of foreboding of defeat. Edwin Bowles had already made the petitioner and

his following this encouraging declaration: 'I don't undertake to seat you, but I will engage to unseat *him*.' Joy mantled in all their faces, and they became eager for the fray. Yet it was hard to conceive how this man could bring such valuable assistance to the side he chose to favour. His was a coarse, sensual face, surmounting a gross figure 'run' in the most animal of all the British 'moulds' kept in stock: a man, too, whose manners and morals were known to correspond with these faithful outside marks and tokens; who was said to be a sort of legal Sybarite; who merely flung his fees from one hand as fast as he received them in the other; who was seen at the Isthmian games, and at the haunts where sham judges and juries play out degrading copies of trials, over whiskies and strong drinks; who loved the company of Phryne and Lais quite as well as that of Themis; who was engulfed up to his thick throat in a miry pool of debts and embarrassments; and over whose golden gains an official person was said to keep careful watch,—representing a whole guild of credi-

tors. This was the gay, boisterous, skilful practitioner who was friend to young Lord Splashley, and young Sir Thomas Baker, Grenadier Guards; who met those youths in cheerful private festivals, and fascinated them by a certain hearty jovial *nisi prius*:—a fascination that resulted in misty money transactions that were to be ‘impeached,’ long after. Happy, then, in the learning of Edwin Bowles, Q.C., the petitioners prepared for battle.

Mr. Maxwell caught some of the excitement of the coming fray, and trained himself with ardour. Happy for him, he had found ♦ an assistant in time. That first night, he unpacked the snowy bales with care and delicacy, and showed their beauties to Jenny. The mixture of corrupt humanity—the publicans, ostlers, beer boys, porters, and general broken-down auxiliaries—whose speeches and observations (some precious as the golden guineas which the other side indeed insinuated had purchased them) were here chronicled, was truly edifying. The fresh scent of the new crisp—to the barristerial nose more fragrant

than that of new-mown hay—was overborne by the fumes of unfinished quart pots, of straw, and of the faint air of stables, which by association seemed to exhale from the entries. But being ‘briefed’ to Mr. Maxwell, they all fell into one common mould. His mind saw but so many men in the ranks. There were conversations at inn-yard corners, in the back room of the public-house, on the railway platform—in which a mysterious being, called ‘Budge,’ always figured,—a sort of election tempter, who tampered with all men; and there was a butcher—a remarkable man, who seemed to have been the very incarnation of bribery.

Jenny presently knew the whole history: about Budge; about the publicans, ostlers, porters, and the remarkable butcher. This election element has more of the dramatic than other shapes of legal proceedings. It is more irregular, and to lay minds more comprehensible. The lawyers fling away their armour, and fight more in the guerilla fashion. Jenny read it all, and seemed to be amused by it. Mr. Maxwell was much pleased that she was

amused by his commentaries and explanations. Jenny was exceedingly sensible, and as she was to carry out a task or duty, tried to lighten by getting an interest in it.

In a few days, Mr. Tandy, of the great parliamentary firm of Bellarmine and Tandy, Old George Street, Westminster, came to wait on Mr. Maxwell, in reference to a consultation or some such arrangement,—a dry, quick man, that seemed to emit sparkles, and who would have to live in action for many weeks to come. Rooms had been taken close to the Houses, where Bellarmine and Tandy might keep a sort of depôt, and have their forces in reserve.

Jenny took interest in these preparations; and Mr. Maxwell was much flattered by her questions. ‘Ah! sir,’ said she, thoughtfully, one evening, ‘there shall come a day when you shall fill another office, and have counsel employed for you. I have often thought how you should be in Parliament. There is that Mr. Holyoake, whom you often told me of, doing very little, I think, sir, you said, at the Equity bar——’

‘I suppose not making eight hundred a year,’ said Mr. Maxwell.

‘Oh, sir!’ said she, with sudden enthusiasm, ‘you *must* be in Parliament; you are tending to it. I see it. I am sure—I am confident I shall see you elected very, *very* shortly.’

Mr. Maxwell was charmed with this honest warmth. More delighted still was he with the allusion to Holyoake, which showed that she knew the inner details of the profession and recollected what he told her.

At last the committee was struck; Mr. Tarter Gibton, the well-known member for Staley-bridge, the chairman. The day was named and the case opened. Jenny wished, with delightful simplicity, that she could go down to the House and look on at the proceedings.

It excited extraordinary interest. The large committee-room was always thronged. From the door barely a glimpse was to be obtained of the committee sitting calmly afar off, and fenced carefully from the crowd. There was Mr. Gibton—a quiet man in a yellow waist-coat—steady, attentive, and keeping all things

straight. There were the other members of the committee—moustachioed young Lord Buckstone, Mr. Wells, Captain Bouchier, Mr. Finucane, the member for Avoca, who were very absorbed and diligent the first day, and took profuse notes; who all gradually fell off into distraction, and wrote and sent away a good many letters on private business.

There were the short-hand writers of the House, racing along at express speed; there were the parliamentary agents; there were the counsel, whose heads seemed like a row of pianoforte dampers, 'buffed' with wigs instead of felt, and who shot up and down with all the jerking motion of those harmonious appliances. The long row was awe-inspiring—even terrible, when they fell to battle, and contended fiercely over the person of a witness.

It was full of dramatic incident, duly reported by Mr. Maxwell, coming home flushed and excited when the day was done—photographed, as it were, for Jenny, who hung suspended on his accents. She knew them all, the actors and incidents, from the butcher down-

wards. But the grand feature was when the butcher had to be put in the chair for examination, who could not decently be kept back, and when, at the close of his testimony, the committee adjourned. It was known that the next day this dangerous butcher would be engaged in person by Edwin Bowles, Q.C., by way of cross-examination, who had kept himself expressly in reserve for this stage of the fight.

Such a crowd, and such packing close and squeezing of the human form. Every one's face overlooked every one's shoulder. There were smiles, tittering, and loud laughter,—even applause, —until the chairman, Mr. Gibton, threatened to have the room cleared. It was protracted through the whole day. The butcher,—a truculent, greasy being, more inclining to the horse and prize-fighting direction than to the harmless titular calling he professed—displayed matchless coolness, tact, and effrontery. Edwin Bowles closed with him many times, but was flung back without giving him a fall. Butcher calm and defiant; butcher at times dealing Edwin Bowles a skilful side-

stroke, which raised much merriment and delight. But it was this that eventually undid him. He became jocular and insolent from security. Edwin Bowles, calm, and waiting patiently for hours, at last saw the opening, rushed in, and flung him. Butcher was cowed, faltered, contradicted himself, became hot, surly, and confused, and finally had the truth wrung from him. When the committee rose, Edwin Bowles sat down, heated, weary, but triumphant; and was felt by all in the room—there were some creditors present, too, struggling between a sense of pecuniary injury and admiration—to be unsurpassed in England as a cross-examiner. That night the Hon. Noel Bashford felt himself half slipping out of his parliamentary chair.

For ten, fifteen days, it was protracted—days inexpressibly sweet to all—to *nearly* all concerned—sweet to the barristerial agriculturists, who, with their legal sickles, reaped the high standing corn of fees. The merest fledgling, who indeed sat diligently, and made one of the rank and file, but never spoke, could

not labour without being 'instructed' and 'refreshed' to the song of fifteen guineas. For his six counsel, then, the Hon. Noel was disbursing about one hundred guineas daily; and even for this outlay he could not secure their services. Mr. Touchstone Shepherd, Q.C., was 'in' two other 'heavy' petitions, and at best could only come rushing in spasmodically to aid his client's interest for ten minutes or so, and sometimes, out of pure decency, examined a 'short' witness—not in stature, but whose evidence could be comprised within half an hour; and sometimes with much heat entered into an altercation with opposing counsel, to show that he was earnest and awake. So was it with Martin Wellès, who rushed in and out also, sat uneasily for a few minutes, did a good deal of nodding and whispering, possibly examined another 'short' witness, and then hurried away. But faithful and constant were the minor fledglings, who, unemployed in other cases, sat there without stirring.

Sweet, pleasant days for the agents parlia-

mentary. With them everything was grand, lavish, luxurious. A whole corps of shorthand writers, of copyists, were busy half the night with the day's evidence, so that every morning with the rolls and coffee, each of the six counsel had his copy, bright, clean, and new upon his table. Twopence per sheet or 'folio' this cost the agent parliamentary; but the agent parliamentary, in his 'costs' to the Hon. Noel, set each folio down at eightpence. Say three hundred and fifty folios for the day's work, and seven copies of the three hundred and fifty folios, and there will be a total in this mere mechanical direction of say fifty or sixty pounds' outlay for each day.

More happy, however, were Binns and Barker, agents to the Huge Leviathan Railway Company, that meanders over half England, and who 'come in' gigantically before a committee with—say fifteen counsel—for whom there must be fifteen copies of evidence, written out at a daily charge of a hundred and forty pounds or so. These are indeed the happy hunting-grounds of solicitors.

For twelve days the battle raged. Edwin Bowles performed prodigies. He was very often present. He bore down everything in a telling speech, mangling and scarifying the butcher in a way one of his profession was never dealt with before. He was vigorous, humorous, forcible, and sarcastic to a degree; wonderful in one who had been up till dawn at a 'mess,' absorbed in chicken hazard; wonderful, too, in one who had signed some heavy notes of hand, that would absorb the rich fee harvests he had been getting in these few days back.

The committee deliberated for two hours and a half, and found according to the usual form.

1°. That the Hon. Noel Bashford was not duly elected to serve in the present Parliament, &c.

2°. That the Hon. Noel Bashford had, by his agents, been guilty of treating, bribery, &c.

3°. That there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to connect the Hon. Noel Bashford, &c., according to the usual form.

Grand jubilee—almost osculation of Edwin

Bowles. The battle had been fought and won. Every one in the ranks—specially the youngest lawyer engaged—considered that he had ministered to the happy result. Mr. Maxwell came home triumphant, and, to the prejudice of his regular, talked it all over with Miss Bell, for three or four hours at least. The day was celebrated by champagne. Miss Bell was absorbed by the details. She heard Edwin Bowles's speech all through, at secondhand. She heard how the committee looked—how it was doubtful at one time—how a member, called Bouchier, was long obstinate—how he gave way at last. In everything Jenny was absorbed. She delighted in it all, even to a dry point of law, which Mr. Maxwell, encouraged by the fascination the subject seemed to exercise over her, was tempted into opening: and so got down the Text Books and Reports, and went into it regularly. She said it was like a story-book, the point of law.

It was past one o'clock that night before he had finished with the engrossing theme.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW GUEST.

Down at the Franklyns there was a certain tempered excitement—now unhappily but little usual with that family—consequent upon the arrival of the guest. Young Welbore Craven had come, had been established in the chamber garnished and set out for him, and was making his company very welcome to all.


He was a tall, brave, bright, open creature; with a fair face, and cheeks almost of a delicate pink. On this ground, a light yellow moustache bloomed efflorescent. He was broad-chested—yet not of rough animal proportions; could walk a mountain, fly a gate of many bars, step deftly over a bog; in short, had graduated with distinction in the Grand Uni-

versity whose curriculum lies in field sports and open-air exercise. But he had no special inner gifts, beyond a fund of tranquil good-humour—always ‘on,’ as it were—not made to play on special and distinguished occasions, just as some men keep the *grands eaux* for festivals. This made him always welcome in every house, and more than supplied the want of those little cascades and devices which others exhibit. And in his absence was often heard the gratifying ejaculation delivered from female lips, ‘Oh! I do *so* like Mr. Craven.’ The being the child of his father, and destined to bear a Red Hand upon his sleeve, was, as it were, a sort of prism held between him and his virtues. It was wonderful how gorgeous was the refraction. The tints were multiplied prodigiously—possibly, it will be said, wholly supplied by that medium. But no; were he yet unfranchised, and walking through the world clanking the chains and fetters of a younger son, he would still have found a welcome. He would not indeed be coveted; but entering into another category, he would

be looked on with favour, and allowed to pass in with a smile at the gate of country-houses. The strict exclusives are not so wholly strict in this regard. Crowns and quarterings, acres and purses, are not the sole passwords. The natural qualities—provided all dross of vulgarity be skimmed away—of freshness, geniality, good-nature, have a magnetic charm of their own. So with young Welbore Craven.

They were very pleasant down at the Franklyns. They disported together like children. The younger girls enjoyed it prodigiously, the more, perhaps, because there had been universal fast of late from all such things. These pastimes were, perhaps, scarcely of the grave or dignified order suited to the ages of the persons engaged. There was a wild reckless freedom, and a rare physical development about them, perhaps more suited to the school and to the age of school-time.

But they were all born in the country—reared in the country—and, as seems to be the case in such instances, had never found their taste for the whole round of country



associations—green fields, green trees, the running water, and the rest—grow enfeebled by satiety. Trite, but very true, is the remark, that it is impossible to read through the grand green book of nature. We never tire of turning over its gorgeously coloured prints, and fresh bright stories.

There was a lake close by the house of the Franklyns, with a little pier down to the water, and a goodly-sized boat. The Franklyn young ladies loved the water; and when they were alone would come down chattering and laughing, of mornings and evenings, and pull the oars with good skill and fair strength. Young Welbore Craven, now on this visit, would come down with them often, and they would put off together, a noisy joyous party—not indeed with any pure love of oarmanship, for little was done in that direction, but from the sheer ‘fun of the thing;’ for the boat moved but lazily; and there was splashing and rocking from side to side, and entanglement of oars, and fictitious perils, and general confusion, to a loud cheerful chorus of unchecked laughter

and general frolic. The elder sister, who must not be taken to be too demure in her temper, and in her quiet way loved their droll exercises too, attended, as it were, by way of general moderator. That strangely youthful young man of business had a sort of leaning to attach himself to these parties,—an odd fancy, for no one *could* be so utterly and hopelessly out of place. Yet for the young to consort with the young, what more natural? Yet it may not be concealed that his company was by no means relished. He was a living inconsistency—an anachronism among their sports. As discordant as the ideas of contingent remainders and a ball-room, a Hebrew root and a wedding, yet with that curious misapprehension of the ends for which he was created, a strange fatality seemed to draw him to the young. He, too, went in the boat, and did splashing according to the infantine laws and canons.

Young Welbore Craven did not relish him from the first. He made no secret of it. His fair open face would contract when he saw the

young man of business approaching with light gay steps. 'Why is this odious attorney always teasing us in this way? Can't he stick to his law and bill of costs? We don't want him.' And presently he had christened him (with a loud boisterous laugh) 'Young Capias,' and the girls welcomed that sobriquet with delight, and by the name of 'Young Capias' he was invariably known among them for the future.

He was considered horribly intrusive, and was always introducing himself with a pleasant boyish *dégage* air into their amusements. He was agreeably free and easy with Miss Charlotte, who, strange to say, would appear to have accepted him on much the same footing. A blank would fall on the whole party when, some little congress of amusement being arranged, the young man of business was seen tripping from the house, in a jaunty lounging fashion, to join their sports. A plot of smooth-shaven grass had been marked out, decorated with poles and flags, all for the now popular game of croquet; with deft delicate touches,

the blue, green, and black balls were all day long spinning along over the grass, and the sharp smart click of the spiteful roquet was heard through the air like dropping musketry. An uncharitable game—a malicious exercise, more or less vindictive, mainly on account of that roquet element. It scarcely evokes the charities of society. He whose green or yellow ball lies within a stroke of victory, but which is savagely shot away across a whole prairie into the remote desert, strikes the ground savagely with this implement, and turns away to hide an impatient smile of vexation.

Young Craven and Miss Charlotte usually played the field—the whole world, in fact. The sides were about evenly matched. They could not then relish the adhesion of the jaunty young man of business when he came tripping forth, swinging his mallet gracefully. Young Craven would fling down his, or send a ball skimming into the distance with a savage stroke. He would not speak, save in a short surly way. ‘Jealousy,’ thought Mr. Crowle, with a simper—and was hugely gratified. It

was all atoned for by Miss Charlotte's sweetness and attention. It was very marked—curiously marked—thought Mr. Crowle—and was very acceptable.

Young Craven's views and 'intentions' were gradually becoming very significant; and it was plain, to common observers, would gradually work themselves clear. Before 'Young Capias' he froze up. Presently, however, he grew sarcastic, at least as sarcastic as his rough open manly temper would let him, and directed a few crude scoffs in the direction of 'Young Capias,' it must be said to the infinite delight of the latter. 'Jealousy,' thought he, and welcomed it with complacency. Something, however, came about presently; and at the end of the second week of young Craven's visit, which, as it were, cleared the air, but made the way very free and open for all parties, a very simple incident—unworthy and almost mean in a historic sense, but with curious results for the future direction of this narrative—took place.

Down by the edge of the lake was a pleasant

little grove of trees, which stretched out in a sort of diminutive peninsula into the waters. The head gardener—an ingenious Scot—who had a fancy for training little conceits, in whatever resources were at his disposal, had cut out a sort of sheltered retreat among the trees—very grateful and acceptable during the hot summer days ; and it had become a fashion with members of the Franklyn family to lay out little expeditions to this spot—to have tea on the island, or strawberries on the island ;—in fact, when anything delicate or acceptable was to be taken, to have it, by any possible excuse, taken down for consumption to the island. The article, of whatever kind, was always held to acquire a richer flavour by the process.

Since the coming of young Welbore Craven, this little retreat had acquired additional popularity. The ploughman, or other agricultural labourer who was homeward plodding his weary way, was often startled by the sounds of boisterous merriment proceeding from the depths of this retreat.

And here, towards five o'clock of one Thursday, were our party gathered; seated, it must be said, with discomfort about a little table, with the 'sensible girl' making tea.

It was 'jolly' — delightful — 'such fun.' Everything, in fact. The fair youth, with the pink cheeks and saffron moustaches, was seated on a smooth ruinous trunk of a tree, which would not remain steady (unavoidably from its natural formation), and that was 'such fun.' The teapot was upset, and that was still greater 'fun.' But the height of enjoyment was reached when young Craven built up some dried sticks very neatly together, under a little portable kettle, and drawing a Vesuvian from his cigar-case set the sticks on fire, and actually boiled the water—which, when poured out, made real tea, not very different from what was partaken of every morning at breakfast.

The relish with which this ordinary beverage was consumed it is impossible to describe; and the whole, it must be again repeated, was eminently 'fun' in the highest degree. And at the bottom of all the 'fun' was young Craven.

‘I wonder,’ said one of the girls, suddenly, ‘that he hasn’t found us out here.’

‘We need not be too sure of that as yet,’ said the other.

‘He—who?’ said the sensible girl.

‘Odious Young Capias,’ said the first, smartly.

‘He was to be out to-day to see papa.’

‘What a creature it is!’ said young Craven.

‘I am beginning to detest him. I can’t bring myself to speak to him. And he is getting so forward and free-and-easy. I snubbed him finely the other day.’

‘But Charlotte likes him,’ said one of the girls. ‘He is one of her pets.’

The youth burst into loud peals of laughter.

‘I’ve remarked it,’ he said. ‘She gets uneasy when we are rough to him. I assure you, she has a great interest in him.’

There was truth in this, for the sensible girl knew, or believed that she knew, how useful a friend he was to her embarrassed father.

‘No,’ she said; ‘I have no great love for Mr. Crowle. But I cannot conceive why you

all dislike him so. He is very good in his own particular line.'

'That's it, exactly,' said the youth, noisily. 'Why doesn't he keep to his own particular line? His is not the line of ladies and gentlemen. He's a low creature — a low, crawling, slimy creature,' added he, with much disgust.

'Oh!' said Charlotte, almost with alarm, and yet smiling. 'What a description!'

'Just what he deserves,' said one of the girls.

'Confound him,' said the youth; 'can't he drudge among his papers, and briefs, and six and eightpences? Why is he always hanging on to us? He really puts me in such a rage. And then, when he tries to be sweet and smooth—confound him—why, I could just take him up by the back of the neck as I would a puppy dog.'

'Hush! hush!' said the sensible girl. 'Poor wretch! he can't help it.'

'I tell you what—wouldn't it be a good joke—a splendid idea, by Jove!'

‘What, what?’ said the younger girls, eagerly.

‘If he were to come poking after us to-day—which he will;—suppose we were all to hide; we’ll take away the sticks which join the island, make a little bridge of twigs, then cover it over with grass and sods. He will come across with his greasy simper, and go souse in.’

They all laughed in exquisite delight at this notion—even the sensible girl.

‘Poor Mr. Capias,’ she said, ‘what treatment you are laying out for him—but it is very funny. The idea of him splashing about there.’

‘Like an eel,’ said one of the girls.

‘He will glisten like a snake in the water, you will see,’ said young Craven.

‘He will change colour like a dying frog.’

‘For shame,’ said the sensible girl.

‘Oh, I see,’ said young Craven; ‘this is private property. Miss Charlotte’s own. We must take care.’

‘Not at all,’ said Charlotte, colouring ever

so little; 'I hate the creature too. He is odious in every sense; but we mustn't plague him; papa would be dreadfully annoyed.'

It was agreed he should not be plagued, and perhaps the result was the same.

It could not have succeeded; for Mr. Crowle had actually, about half an hour before, arrived at the house on business—had, by way of commencing business promptly, asked for the young ladies—had been told they were down at the island drinking tea, and had set off smirking and smiling, and with a light step, to join the youthful party. What so natural? The young should consort with the young. He had heard the chatter of their voices among the trees, and had stopped, anxious not to disturb them or come upon them with too much surprise. The young man of business among the trees, listened to this idle chatter, no doubt, with unconcern; but another ploughman, homeward plodding his weary way, met him suddenly, just as he began to move, and though generally careless of physiognomy, was struck by the savage smile and impatient gestures of

the young man of business, who was, besides, talking to himself; and the ploughman looked for a long while after him, muttering something about 'clean daft.' Mr. Crowle did not join the party of young people that day, though at dinner he was pleasant and agreeable as usual. No one would have detected any change in his feelings towards them all. He was a very skilful creature, this young man of business, but very vain—ridiculously vain—sensitive to a degree, and specially sensitive on his personal charms. Any affront therefore in that direction galled him sorely. The only thing observed, and observed too with delight, was that he fell away by degrees from that old association with the amusements of the younger people; and that he now and again gave out oracular utterances, curiously pointed and full of mystery, chiefly relating to the uncertain course of human affairs. These he would address to Miss Charlotte, with an attempt at fierce sarcasm; and these were afterwards a source of intense amusement to the whole family, who would treasure them up, and have them re-

peated over and over again by young Craven, in the tone and manner of the original.

So the warp and woof of life at the Franklyn's moved on slowly for a week or so more, and was working into a quiet pattern. The Crowle thread was gradually being withdrawn, but two other threads were gradually being brought closer together. Finally, one evening the quiet girl came to her father's study, and without flutter or agitation, but just as though she came to tell him that Johnson, the steward, was waiting to see him, told him how young Welbore Craven had that very evening made her a most important proposal, one on which the whole wilderness of her life depended—hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows.

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